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No. 26

April, 1896

John La Farge

*Artist and Writer*

*by*

CECILIA WAERN



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*Prosperitas.*

*Sketch for part of a Window in the House of William H. Vanderbilt Esq.*



# JOHN LA FARGE

*ARTIST AND WRITER*

*By*

CECILIA WAERN



LONDON

SEELEY AND CO. LIMITED, ESSEX STREET, STRAND

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1896



# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

## PLATES

	PAGE
Prosperitas. Sketch for part of a Mosaic Glass Window . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Official Presentation of Gifts of Food, Samoa. Water-colour Drawing . . . . .	90

## COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS

Studies from Life : Child's Head, Hand, Old Indian . . . . .	14
Study from Life : Father Hecker reading Goethe . . . . .	16
Wild Roses and Water Lily. Water-colour Drawing . . . . .	26
Infant Samuel. Sketch for part of a Window . . . . .	52
Sketch for the Angel of Help, in Memorial Window . . . . .	60
Samoa Girls in the Seated Dance . . . . .	88

## ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

Bishop Hatto. From the Drawing on Wood . . . . .	19
The Wolf Charmer. From the Drawing on Wood . . . . .	23
Old House in Snow-storm, Newport, R.I., 1860. From an Oil Painting in the possession of Thornton K. Lothrop, Esq., Boston . . . . .	25
Head of St. John. Study for a Picture in the possession of the Rev. Cyrus Bartol, Boston . . . . .	31
Memorial Cross and Tomb at Newport, R.I. . . . .	39
The Arrival of the Magi. Right-hand Panel of the Painting in the Church of the Incarnation, New York . . . . .	41
Pomona. Carved and inlaid Panel in Dining room of the House of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Esq., New York . . . . .	45
The Ascension. Painting in the Chancel of the Church of the Ascension, New York . . . . .	47

	PAGE
Music. From a Painting in the Residence of the Hon. Whitelaw Reid, New York . . . . .	48
The Old Philosopher. Mosaic and Cloisonné Glass Window in the Crane Memorial Library, Quincy, Mass. . . . .	55
Angels: in the lower part of a circular Mosaic Glass Window in the Second Presbyterian Church, Chicago, in course of preparation . . . . .	58
Mosaic Glass Window. Jewels and pressed Glass. In the Residence of W. H. Vanderbilt, Esq. . . . .	61
Mosaic Glass Doorlight. In the Residence of D. O. Mills, Esq. . . . .	61
Mosaic Glass Window. Ordinary work, simple cutting . . . . .	62
Part of a Mosaic Glass Window . . . . .	63
Mosaic Glass Window. Pressed and dropped Glass . . . . .	64
Mosaic Glass Window in the Residence of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Esq., New York . . . . .	65
Mosaic Glass Window in the Residence of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Esq., New York . . . . .	66
Mosaic Glass Window in the Residence of Frederick L. Ames, Esq., Boston . . . . .	67
Angel Sealing the Servants of God in their Foreheads. Watson Memorial Window in Trinity Church, Buffalo . . . . .	69
Mosaic Glass Window: the Flag of Harvard College, known as the "Battle Window." Memorial Hall, Cambridge, Mass. . . . .	73
Three lower Windows on the Staircase of the House of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Esq., New York . . . . .	75
Part of a Mosaic Glass Window. In the Residence of William H. Vanderbilt, Esq., New York . . . . .	76
Blind Man and his Daughter at Vaiala, Samoa. From a Water-colour Drawing . . . . .	83
Sivá Dance at Night, Samoa. From a Water-colour Drawing . . . . .	85
Sivá Dance at Vaiala, Samoa. From a Water-colour Drawing . . . . .	87
Sivá in the Seated Dance, Samoa . . . . .	88
Aitutagata, the Hereditary Assassins of King Malietoa, Sapapali, Savaii, Samoa, October 1890. From a Water-colour Drawing in the possession of Henry L. Higginson, Esq., Boston . . . . .	93



# JOHN LA FARGE

## PRELIMINARY

IN this endeavour to give an account of the life and work of John La Farge the writer has purposely avoided any attempt to assign him set rank. In treating of eminent living artists from foreign lands information is generally more desirable than a definite critical estimate; such estimate, always debatable, being doubly unsatisfactory when the works of art on which it is based are not fully known to many readers. Therefore I have thought it best to supplement the illustrations by a brief account of Mr. La Farge's development, ideals, and aims, together with a few hints as to the temperament and gifts that constitute his artistic personality. I have also tried to give some notion of the surroundings that have influenced him—as far as those could be set forth by a foreigner after a few years' acquaintance with the man and his country. As an offset to certain disadvantages, I may mention having been allowed access to several sources of private information and reminiscence regarding the time of transition and formation which constituted the background of this American painter's career. Circumstances have likewise been favourable in bringing me, long after my critical estimate of La Farge as an artist was formed, into personal relations with this remarkable man, allowing me to become familiar with the unpublished journals of his travel in the South Seas, and with many other interesting memoranda and fragments of autobiography. Knowing how greatly such material must increase the value of my essay, I have not hesitated to embody extracts from these in my text. For the author's

## JOHN LA FARGE

generous permission to do so I here offer my sincere thanks. I have moreover made free use of Mr. La Farge's published works : the *Considerations on Painting*, lately published by Messrs. Macmillan and Co., and the series of *An Artist's Letters from Japan*, which appeared in the *Century Magazine* ; also of a pamphlet on the *American Art of Glass*, printed for private circulation. While indicating most of the passages so used by quotation marks, I have not thought it necessary in every case to burden my text with special references.

Thanks are further due to several persons for the loan of pictures or sketches, and to Mr. La Farge for permission to reproduce unpublished drawings, the copyright of which belongs to him.

## CHAPTER I

### EARLY LIFE—STUDIES IN EUROPE

JOHN LA FARGE, the elder, father of the living artist, was a French officer who drifted to America in 1806, under some of the peculiar circumstances that lend a romantic charm to the immigrations of the early part of our century. To us latter-day immigrants, looking back from the arid surroundings of intensified city life on those days of open-air adventure, they seem almost as remote from the American social conditions that we know as does life in the South Sea Islands. Nevertheless they are factors in the complex and baffling civilization of to-day along the Atlantic seaboard, and every little glimpse of them has thus a double fascination for outsiders. Jean-Frédéric de la Farge, when a midshipman in the French navy, took part in the famous and ill-fated expedition of General Leclerc to St. Domingo, where, tempted by a still more adventurous life and by promotion to the rank of lieutenant, he exchanged into the land forces. While on an inland expedition he was taken captive by the insurgent negroes under General Guerrier. His companions were tortured to death, but his life was spared in order—so runs the family tradition—that he might instruct the future President of the negro republic in reading and writing. De la Farge was held a prisoner even after the withdrawal of the French, but at last, being warned by his coloured friends of the impending massacre of all remaining whites on Easter Sunday, 1806, he managed to escape in company with a Dutch gentleman and his wife. They put out to sea in a small boat and got away along the coast; then, abandoning the boat, made their way through a tropical forest to the Spanish side of the island. Here they found a ship which took them to Philadelphia.

After Leclerc's death there was less hope of advancement for the officers of Napoleon's rivals. The young Frenchman, who had already seen the most terrible side of war, was quick to note the great commercial future awaiting America and decided to settle there. A youth of energy and keen insight, he rapidly became very wealthy, as wealth was reckoned in those days, by ventures on the high seas, running blockades, and later by purchases of land in New York and the Southern States. A noticeable colony of well-born and well-bred Frenchmen lived in New York at the time, *émigrés* of the Revolution or refugees from St. Domingo. There was even a French school, half military, kept by Victor Bancel, a graduate of La Flèche, in which General Moreau of Hohenlinden fame occupied himself by teaching during his exile in New York.

A sister of this Victor Bancel was married some time in the thirties to a planter from St. Domingo, M. Binsse de St. Victor, and her daughter became the wife of John La Farge the elder, who had sold his plantations in Louisiana and was residing on his estates in Northern New York, where many French names, including his own, still remain as names of places. New York then was very different from New York now. One of the artist's earliest recollections is that of watching a sunset over the Hudson from their house in beautiful, dignified St. John's Park, and seeing all the little roofs and dormers of a side street outlined against the sky. Those were the days when people still walked on the battery, where large trees grew near the water's edge, and called on their friends living in stately old houses that are now demolished, or, if remaining, have been converted into consulates and emigrant agencies. In the early forties one of the waves of uptown movement landed the La Farge family in Washington Place, Washington Square. Even as late as this, New York retained its aspect of a cultivated provincial town in country surroundings. Intercourse was neighbourly, social life full of quiet refinement, literature flourished, art was academic and dignified. On sunny afternoons the youths went to meet the maidens in Washington Square or Union Square, which still kept their straight walks under trees, with little winding paths between.

New York of to-day is, æsthetically, a most confusing place. All observant travellers dwell on the contrasts presented between self-satisfied ignorance and survivals of a culture so mellow that our own seems young



n comparison ; between courtesy and lack of tact, between wealth and pauperism, between luxury and discomfort. There is another contrast, less often noted, yet of great importance—that forced upon the artistic sense through impressions of sight. On the ugliness of New York it is unnecessary to dwell ; every foreign visitor of culture has marked the hideous sky-lines, the untidy streets, the discordant mosaic of signs and posters, the dirty awnings and plate-glass windows along the irregular street fronts of the side avenues, the soulless uniformity of the brown stone streets, and the aggressive crudity of many central quarters. And yet the city can boast of fine vistas and of an architecture which is both interesting and pleasing, especially towards night-fall, when there is a certain magnificent picturesqueness of light and of steam-clouds and towering masses. Central Park is one of the finest examples of art in landscape gardening that I know of, but it is disfigured by poor sculpture and architecture. All these contradictions, trying enough in themselves, are set in landscape surroundings of ideal beauty : of the kind that cannot but influence imagination. From the upper part of the island, overlooking the capes and bays of the Hudson and its mighty sweep as it passes the Palisades, the lines are long, clear, subtle, and varied ; the colour combines delicacy and intensity, giving to the landscape now a classical severity, now a Southern glow, or again a spiritual beauty, imaginative and dreamy. But most characteristic of all is the unique, wonderful atmosphere of the Indian summer, when a shimmering haze of gold and purple floats between ethereal hills.

It is a sad blow to the theory of the influence of surroundings that those of New York have not been able to persuade the architecture into anything like their own semblance. With a few notable exceptions the ugliness of man's handiwork matches in degree the beauty of the scenery. It was not so in the earlier days of leisure, when great ennobling influences had time to work—it is an artificial product of complicated social and economical conditions.

The very violence of the contrast between art and nature must give an intensity to æsthetic emotions that has no parallel in Europe, except, perhaps, in some of our northern countries.

When John La Farge was a child this contrast had scarcely made itself felt on this side of the water. To us those days—Washington

Irving's days—seem steeped in a mellow light of culture and sunlit provincial peace which cannot be entirely due to our fancy. All writers of that time speak of the social life as something finished, refined; of trees everywhere in the quiet streets, of frequent excursions along country roads to Bloomingdale, Harlem, and other peaceful country villages. I dwell on this matter because both the old-fashioned culture of their childhood and the sharp contrasts of manhood must have been factors in the development of the Americans of Mr. La Farge's generation.

His childhood was spent in a home full of books and valuable paintings, among the latter being a Lemoine and some excellent Dutch pictures. He was taught to draw in a precise, old-fashioned way by his grandfather Binsse, himself a miniature-painter of some talent. "Protected by circumstances from that desperate struggle with poverty which has maimed most of our painters and crushed many, he received a classical and legal education in this country, and then went abroad. Without having been directed towards the fine arts especially, he found himself as a young man in Paris disposed to try his hand at painting as a gracious accomplishment. Moved by this desire he procured an introduction to Couture and went to work in the latter's studio; but he had not been very long there when the wise artist found out his new pupil's talent and advised him to go away and study by himself.

"‘Your place,’ said Couture, ‘is not among these students. They have no ideas. They imitate me. They are all *trying to be little Coutures!*’" <sup>1</sup>

Mr. La Farge worked in a studio because his father wished him to do so, but outside of its walls were the Louvre with its Titians and Rembrandts, the drawings of the old masters, and endless opportunities for archæological study, which had already begun to interest him. There was also the house of his relatives the St. Victors, where lived his bed-ridden great-uncle, author of many works, historical, critical, and artistic, who had known friends and foes of the French Revolution, had been an *émigré* in Russia, and who retained his interest in all things, even to the theatres. Paul de St. Victor, the well-known writer and critic, was La Farge's cousin; and many remarkable and gifted people came to the house: Russians, members of the Institute, priests,

<sup>1</sup> G. P. Lathrop in *Scribner's Monthly*, 1881.

art critics, and literary men, among them Charles Blanc and Théophile Gautier. The young artist's experience with Couture and his impressions of European art are best given in one of the fragments of autobiography already referred to.

"In the course of my stay in Europe in 1856 my father advised me to study painting under some master, partly as an accomplishment, partly as an escape from my desultory interest in many things. I felt also that the study of art would be helped if the knowledge of the most technical division became a possession of mine. Edward May, the American painter, suggested his own master, Couture, for a teacher, and took me to him. Couture was not pleased at my reasons for study, and complained of there being already too many amateurs. I pleaded my cause successfully, however, and remember arguing the value of the middle men, who could explain and interpret new variations and expressions to a more outside public.

"My stay at the *atelier* was not a long one. It was mainly taken up with the drawing from the model. My master not only approved of my work, but warned me of the danger of imitating his manner through the methods of his students. My own manner was very different from his and theirs, and somewhat old-fashioned, so that I tried to modify it. Possibly I would have done so consciously in the direction of those around me, but the master's advice was to study and copy the drawings of the old masters in the Louvre, and to postpone the practice of painting. All the masters in the Louvre were his choice, and he recommended me to copy and study whomever I might care for at the moment. For the eighteenth century I cared little. For the seventeenth I had much respect, but was too young for them. Further back than that I had likings which included even the artificial Italians and the disagreeable Germans. With quite a comprehension of my inevitable failure, I made drawings from Correggio, Leonardo, and others. My greatest fascination, however, was Rembrandt in his etchings. I was all the more willing because the methods of the master were not satisfactory to me. They seemed to me only ways of rendering some locality of the things depicted, and not a successful attempt at a synthesis of light and air. I noticed how Couture painted his landscapes as a form of curtain behind a study of the model, which in reality belonged to the studio in which it

was a part, and, with the uncompromising veracity of youth, I could not understand the necessary compromises with the general truth of nature. Besides that, I was becoming more and more dissatisfied with the systems of painting which assumed some convenient way of modelling in tones that were arbitrary, and of using colour, after all, merely as a manner of decorating these systems of painted drawing. My youthful intolerance required the relations of colour for shadow and for light to be based on some scheme of colour-light that should allow oppositions and gradations representing the effects of the different directions and intensities of light in nature, and I already became much interested in the question of the effect of the complementary colours. It seemed to me that I noticed the recognition of such or similar truths in the greater of the old painters, and I missed its directness in the more modern work about me, except in Delacroix, who fascinated me, but troubled me, and in some of the landscape painters then fighting their way to fame. I was intolerant—yet Parisian skill interested me as well as the keen wit developed in the life in the studios. I still remember some of the master's sharp criticisms of other painters—many of them distasteful to his provincial pupil. Of my brief sojourn I remember little else, unless it be that M. Puvis de Chavannes, also an amateur apparently, must have been in the studio occasionally.

“Intending to return, and pursuing the teacher's advice, I followed the drawings of the old masters in the collections of Munich and Dresden (this was before the time of photographs), and gave up for that an invitation to accompany Paul de St. Victor and Charles Blanc in a tour of Northern Italy. I have never known whether I did well or ill, for cannot tell what the effect upon me might have been of the inevitable impression of the great Italian paintings seen in their own light and their native place.

“A visit to the Manchester Exhibition and a short stay in England determined for many years certain admirations, and confirmed me in the direction of my ideas of colour. The few pre-Raphaelite paintings that I saw, and the drawings of some of the leaders in that movement, appealed strongly to me. Nor did they seem disconnected from the charm of Sir Joshua and of Gainsborough, or from the genius of Turner, which yet offended me by its contradiction of the urbanity and sincerity



of the great masters whom I cared for most. But the pre-Raphaelites, as seen through my eyes—Millais, and Hunt, and Rossetti, and Ford Madox Brown (Sir Edward Burne Jones had not yet appeared within my horizon)—seemed to me to be willing to meet many of the great problems of colour, and my youthful energies sympathised with the stress and intensity of their dramatic programme. These likings I retained later when I began to think again of painting, even though Mr. Ruskin's teachings had become stumbling-blocks rather than helps to my likings and my judgments. I find the trace of these influences pleasantly lingering in some of the drawings which I made even ten years later, and some few words of praise accidentally dropped by Millais or Rossetti in favour of some trifle of mine which had found its way to England pleased me as establishing a relation to them that my general tendencies of work and study could not imply to many of my friends. For, by that time, the Frenchmen—Rousseau, Corot, Millet—represented for me the most important of the European developments, and my liking for them, which was not one of imitation, included also a more serious appreciation of the individual importance of Delacroix. I did not feel inclined to consider these various masters as guides in whose hand I should merely put mine, but, following my own studies and my own desires, I liked to think that, in a more humble way, on a lower level, I was still travelling forward in some road leading in the same direction as theirs. Giotto did not seem to me the antithesis of Rembrandt, and, in my first attempts at painting for churches, I certainly had in mind the directness of the earliest of masters, at least in so far as to believe that their example represented and contained the main lessons of our art."

## CHAPTER II

### RELIGIOUS PICTURES—STUDIES FROM NATURE—DRAWINGS ON WOOD

As yet, however, the young man had no wish to become a painter. He returned to New York, entered a lawyer's office, spent his leisure as other young men did ; found time for sketching, dreaming, observing—found time also for much reading of poetry, mystic philosophy, logic, books of travel, history, science, anything that would show him a new aspect of the infinite mystery which surrounds all things. He kept up his archæological studies with the help of books and engravings, for photography had not yet brought the art of the world within the reach of all. The prints from the Giotto's in Padua, published by the Arundel Society, faulty though they were, gave him great delight. In the distressingly crude churches his imagination evoked visions of new possibilities for an art both deeply religious and decorative. At the same time the Far East began to fascinate both the mystic and the artist in him. Still he remained undecided. As he somewhere says : “ No one has struggled more against his destiny than I ; nor did I for many years fully acquiesce in being a painter, though I learned the methods and studied the problems of my art. I had hoped to find some other mode of life, some other way of satisfying the desire for a contemplation of truth, unbiassed, free, and detached.” And all this while the technique of painting began to interest him more and more seriously.

New York at this time must already have grown to be very different from the New York of La Farge's childhood. As one reads or listens one catches glimpses of a growing city ; of fine types of old culture remaining while keen young spirits from other States crowd in,—the beginning of that centralisation which has made New York one of the



676

STUDIES OF A CHILD'S HEAD, AN OLD RED INDIAN, AND A HAND.





cosmopolitan cities of the world. The main impression left upon one's mind is that of ambitious provincialism tempered by an element of old-world bookish culture, not without some demand for art, but art that we now find it almost impossible to understand : the kind represented in "art unions" and academies, and that went with red plush sofas and heavy rose-wood carving. The most prominent group of artists composed the Hudson River School, so called because their work was identified with the scenery surrounding New York. They painted the Hudson as they painted the Catskills, or Lake George, or any other scenery that was "grand and picturesque." It is very hard to do them justice now. Europe has its counterpart to this school of arranged landscapes with effective trees, conventional sunlight, and glassy water ; we have all seen specimens of them, speculated vaguely over the nature of the impulse that prompted their creators, and been more perplexed than helped by certain signs of talent which they display : a general feeling for nature not strong enough to bring the artist face to face with her ; some understanding of composition not deep enough to produce pictures of the kind that used to be called "historic" and that we are now beginning to term "synthetic." Although Mr. La Farge felt the admiration of an earnest beginner for the older craftsmen, it is evident that such a school could not help him in his needs or sympathise with his deep appreciation of art like the Japanese, then so little understood anywhere, or of the religious painting of the early Italians. But he went on painting, and was soon fortunate in finding both a friend and a master in William Hunt, whom he followed to Newport, Rhode Island.

Hunt was a New Englander, fresh from long residence in France, where he had been one of the first discoverers and a favourite pupil of Jean François Millet. He might have made for himself a European reputation save for the conviction common to many strong men that his place was in his own country. He may be called the earliest interpreter of the modern French school in America. After this lapse of time it is difficult for us to judge him by his work alone, for, like many other artists who have influenced their contemporaries, much of his power lay in a vigorous personality. He was a suggestive and successful teacher, and the time absorbed by giving lessons has unfortunately deprived us of much original work. Although in close personal association with Millet,

and even imitating him, Hunt was unconsciously more influenced by Couture. La Farge, in turn, was much influenced by Hunt, especially in figure-painting. In the painting of still-life and flowers he followed a method of his own, based on the principles that he had admired in the pre-Raphaelites. It is a noteworthy fact that he did not as yet feel any special aptitude for the rendering of colour, although he saw it everywhere. He suffered so much from the technical difficulties of painting that at Hunt's suggestion he worked for a time in values of black and white, placing his colour in over-painting with timid care, as can be seen in the early study of a boy's head now in the Boston Museum. Becoming more skilful, he painted everything that came to hand, refraining from deliberate choice of subject. "The development of the art of painting seemed to him the rendering of the gradations of light and air through which we see form, and the problem of to-day was how to paint anything and invest it with beauty by mere sincerity and observation."

When he began painting from nature out of doors his master found fault with him for "paying too much attention to refinements which not one artist in a hundred would understand." But to the young man it seemed impossible that grass should be always of the same green, and that the hour of the day should make no difference in effects. The world of sight was full of infinite mystery, of endless variety, not to be represented by a method which could be taught by recipe. Notwithstanding that the methods of master and pupil were so widely divergent, their close personal sympathy continued cordial throughout.

In 1860 Mr. La Farge married Miss Margaret Perry, a great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin, and a granddaughter of the Commodore Perry who commanded at the battle of Lake Erie. He now made his home in Newport, Rhode Island, and the following years were spent partly there and partly in New York. Dreams of the possibility of realizing his conceptions of religious painting began to occupy his mind. This was the period of the civil war. The artist was debarred by extreme short-sightedness from enlisting in the army, but, like all Americans, he felt deeply the great struggle which was going on. Some of the figures painted at the time, notably that of St. Paul, show the influence of his patriotic emotions in a very interesting way. This picture, which I know only in reproduction, is no longer in the complete



FATHER HECKER READING GOETHE.





state described by Mr. Lathrop in his essay in *Scribner's Monthly*, 1881. It has received some injury, especially to the head, while cleaning and repairing have hurt it still more. I will quote from Mr. Lathrop's article :—

“The figure of St. Paul, alone, stands facing us, as if we were among his listeners. This in itself is a bold and original conception. Instead of the whole scene being placed before us, with the Apostle and his hearers equally removed from us, as in Raphael's cartoon, our imagination is quickened into a half-belief that the saint is actually present, and no more than ourselves a mere effigy on canvas. To produce this effect was, of course, harder than to conceive of it ; but the attempt has succeeded. The preacher stands majestic, at ease, with the rough, unstudied repose of a strong and well-developed man. His bare feet rest firmly on the pavement. Behind him the square-set stones of a low wall rise nearly to his waist. A white canopy, held by a cord to thin wooden pilasters projecting above this wall, forms a light roof above him and falls in straight, thin folds behind him. At each side we get a glimpse of trees and sky, and the two ends of the hill of the Acropolis jut up in the far background, the intermediate outline being very faintly defined through the almost transparent linen of the curtain. By means of the screening linen partially shutting off the landscape the main part of the saint's figure—including the movement of his arms and the powerful head—is brought out strongly. His gesture is masterly. The right arm is held forward from the elbow, and the strong hand turned with the palm up, but inclined slightly downward. The left hand moves only so much as it would naturally do in the case of a man expounding something—that is, the main intent is thrown into the right hand, and the left acts quietly in sympathy with it. This, assisted by the pose of the body, the right side of which is advanced more than the other, at once gives the idea of the preacher's facing an assembly intent upon his words. The colours of his draperies are green and red, and the sleeve of the right arm turns back from the wrist. The head, with its sun-browned forehead, and stern, thoughtful features, is extremely solemn and full of indescribable gravity ; yet through this look there steals a subdued smile of pride in the greatness of the subject which the preacher has to unfold.

"The curtain, it must be noted, is not absolutely white, but has the effect of white, so that a burst of light, coming through the lower corner at the right, and answering the gleam of white clouds floating across the rich, soft blue of the distant heaven, may have its due intensity. This subordination of the curtain, however, has a higher object. After one has looked for some time at the head without noticing any unusual adjunct there begins to dawn from the canvas, just above, a dim halo, as if the holiness of the man had but then made itself felt. At first you are aware only of the man, but gradually, as his presence possesses you more, the halo breaks upon your sight, and you behold the saint. After this, the faint, awe-inspiring irradiation does not again die away, and the saint and the man become identical, their attributes remain blended before you. It is useless to make any comment on an achievement so infinitely refined, so decidedly a spiritualization of art, as this. A purely intellectual perception of the relation between the saintly and the human has here been expressed in picture, the material substance of the pigments being subjected to the thought with a degree of art that is beyond praise and strangely original in kind. The invisible halo brightening into visibility, and then never dying out, is not the result of a trick, but attained by the nicest correlation of parts and balancing of values. It comes as the crown of a thoughtful, earnest, patient art, directed by a sentiment æsthetically true, but also deeper than the play of all æsthetics—resting on religious faith. The artist who could slowly lift through all the technical process of painting, this breathing figure into life must have had a much more serious purpose to sustain him than that merely pictorial aim which has governed most painters since Fra Angelico or Albert Dürer, even when they have supposed themselves religious in their tone."

A *Madonna* and a *St. John*, parts of a large triptych painted for a Catholic church in New York, though not accepted for this position, are among the most important of the artist's work. Painted only four or five years after the artist's first efforts to express his ideas of colour in a personal method of painting, they already show a remarkable sense of harmony, with richness and depth of colour equal to his later work.

About this time Mr. La Farge's scientific interest in the phenomena of optics was strengthened by the acquaintance of Mr. John Bancroft, an



*Bishop Hatto. From the Drawing on Wood.*





artist who, like himself, had felt the fascination of colour analysis. Since the discovery of the spectroscope the laws and composition of light have been made accessible even to laymen, but thirty-three years ago this was not the case : such knowledge could come only from personal study and artistic insight. In Mr. La Farge's own words : "There is in each competent artist a sort of unconscious automatic mathematician, who, like the harmonist in music, the colourist in painting, resolves in his way the problem of sight or sound which the scientist puts into an equation."

. . . . "Nature, the world of the eye, is always singing to the painter. The notes of the prism continue indefinitely, and the painter, or he who has his temperament, sees at every moment in the world about him the absolute harmony which the other arts obtain by effort. This is why the record of nature is the painter's manner of expression." Some of the results of these observations are scattered through Mr. La Farge's writings.

Side by side with scientific interest went artistic production and constant study of the appearance of nature. The sketch-books of this time are many in number ; they contain first thoughts and careful finished studies ; slight, but comprehensive, records of pose and gesture ; rocks and sea, plants and animals, imaginative vagaries and ornamental fancies.

Among the many flowers that he studied, water-lilies had for him an especial fascination. In their natural surroundings they afford interesting problems of the combination of different luminous values which make of them almost a grammar of flower-painting. The lotus has always been pre-eminently the flower of the mystic.

This period of growth in the life of our artist was broken by a severe illness in 1866, from which he did not fully recover for several years. But during his prolonged convalescence he could not be idle. As an amusement, and to divert his mind from suffering, he made drawings on wood for magazines and books. Among his very first drawings had been illustrations for some of the poems of Robert Browning. These have never been published, nor have those made for Longfellow's *Skeleton in Armour*. Among certain illustrations of his in the *Riverside Magazine* may be mentioned *The Wolf-charmer*, *Bishop Hatto*, *The Giant and the Travellers*, *The Fisherman and the Genie*, two of which are here reproduced. They were engraved by Mr. Henry Marsh.



Mr. Lathrop, in his article, has the following appreciative notice of the drawing of *The Wolf-charmer* :—

“The *raison d'être* of his picture lies in the elfish sympathy between the intelligent man and the savage beast of prey, conveyed by the expression of the charmer's face, and the cautious, soft, malignant tread with which he keeps in step to the movement of the wolves. His very toes resemble theirs ; he seems to be gnawing his bagpipe.”

Mr. La Farge was justly pleased when, years afterwards in Japan, he was shown a copy of this drawing in the studio of a well-known Japanese artist, who saluted him as the “Wolf-Man” and said : “You must have painted that with a Japanese brush”—which was the case.

To him, however, these drawings were of lesser importance, and he now gave his chief study to landscape. While the average public and the average painter were not sympathetic, he had the friendly appreciation of certain contemporaries. Among the artists I may mention Winslow Homer, Homer Martin, George Butler ; among the writers Emerson, Stedman, Aldrich. Many of the critics were kindly, notably Mr. Brownell, who made himself an interpreter of the artist during the inevitable period of misconception. What indeed had this innovator, with his obstinate conviction that a landscape meant a fragment of nature painted as it looked to him—what had he in common with the art then in vogue ? In the eyes of many he sinned against the very canons of his craft. Who ever saw violet shadows in nature ? Who cared for a little old New England farm-house and a solitary apple-tree standing lonely and forlorn in the snow ? It was of this harmless painting (reproduced on p. 25) that a distinguished member of the Academy of Design was heard lamenting “that any one could paint such a low picture !”

It is difficult to give by mere description any adequate idea of Mr. La Farge's landscapes ; the meagre help of black and white does not assist us much. Their chief charm depends on the subtle personality of colour, touch, and artistic vision which pervades them. Yet, roughly speaking, his work may be described as falling into two classes, representing the two principal tendencies of his mind—his reverent accuracy of statement, and what may be called his personal spiritual attitude. This is well stated by him in his *Considerations on Painting* : “Through this following and pursuit of the fact that each artist sees in his own



*The Wolf Charmer. From the Drawing on Wood.*





way, through memories of what he has been, and of what he has liked—even when he says to himself, in assertive moments, ‘that is the way the thing looked’—we shall come to perceive, perhaps, why it is that this faceting of truth must be—how the perpetual Maia, the illusion and enchantment of appearances, sings for each of us a new personal song, as if she returned our admiration, as if she cared—indeed, as if she



*Old House in Snow-storm, Newport, R.I., 1860.*

*From an Oil Painting in the possession of Thornton K. Lothrop, Esq., Boston.*

existed—in the way that we say we know her ; for she takes form in us and fits our shapes.”

Thus we find in Mr. La Farge the pre-Raphaelite tendency, based on the desire to render the phenomena of nature, as seen by him, literally, faithfully, with absolute precision, insisting on the structures of the rocks, the characteristic growth of the trees, the look of the atmosphere as influenced by the time of day, the direction of the wind, the season, the weather. There is also what I should like to call the impressionist tendency (if this much-abused word may still be used in

a wide and comprehensive sense) inspired by the wish to render the whole thing, the imaginative essence of the scene. While painting conscientiously throughout, from carefully considered under-preparations (usually built up from light to dark), he often leaves the corners vague, giving a single deep and suggestive impression. His interest in many things, his passion for accuracy, his childlike delight in fidelity of rendering, have occasionally been so many stumbling-blocks to critics, who have not perceived that the experimental bent of mind which has carried the artist so far in other directions has induced him to keep as mementoes first essays of various kinds, imaginative or technical.

In the scenery of the island of Newport, made up of undulating land traversed by ridges of rocks which enclose flat marshy valleys open to the sea, Mr. La Farge has found sufficient inspiration; it is a place that seems an epitome of many others. In parts its lines are wild and rugged, magnifying themselves as in the heart of the mountains; again is found gentle beauty of detail in stream and grove. The island has swelling uplands dotted over with trees and hedges pleasant and smiling to the eye; steep rocks gleaming with light and dropping down into seas of delicate beauty; silvery sands, often with a great surf; long stretches of marshy meadow along the shores of the sea; wind-slanted groves; and here and there, apart from the rest, *Michel-angelesque* trees, lonely, rugged, and grand. It has an old harbour full of deep-sea poetry; an old town on a hillside, still redolent of the romance of seaport towns; above all it has an atmosphere—an imaginative atmosphere, rare in America, and yet distinctly American—a physical atmosphere of singular beauty fraught with elements of contrast. Land-winds make everything sharp and clear, emphasizing the hard structure of the rocks, the bleak New England aspect. Sea-winds bring out the soft, languorous southern character of the place, clothing it in veiled radiance, bringing fogs that hang in masses (tinged violet at midday) over a sea of sapphire blue along the white grass-lined beaches.

It is not unnatural to suppose that these varied aspects of Newport should have influenced the development of the different sides of the artist's treatment of landscapes. Among some of Mr. La Farge's best-known landscapes that belong to this time I may mention two of Newport scenery.





WILD ROSES AND WATER LILY.

*From a Water Colour Drawing in the possession of M. B. Philipps, Esq., New York.*



Imaginative impressionism is represented in the well-known picture owned by Mrs. Thornton Lothrop of Boston, painted in 1868-69. This painting, known as *New England Meadow Land*, or *Paradise Valley, Newport*, is a careful study of hill and dale gently undulating to the sea, painted in the full midday light of a slightly veiled midsummer sky, a few faint shadows falling away from the spectator. It may be regarded as a careful modelling of innumerable values of a few colours.

The pre-Raphaelite tendency of the artist has deliberately defined itself in the painting of the *Last Valley* (owned by Professor Agassiz of Cambridge), executed, like the others, entirely out of doors and belonging to the same period.

Here the foreground and greater part of the picture are in shadow, while the latest light of day falls along the upper part of a long rocky ridge running off in abrupt perspective. The deep cool shadows in the valley below are strongly tinged with blue light. "The underpainting of shadows was indeed blue, that of the lights red, and the entire picture was all carefully studied in these balances of tone. Only by such a method could the work go on indefinitely, with continual additions of details, and still remain a simple study of nature." In this conception of the use of tone colour La Farge was supported against much non-comprehension on the part of his contemporaries by the precedent of the Japanese, "in all other respects so truthful and accurate." This is what he says of them, writing a year or two later (1869) (in a chapter upon Japanese Art, written for the book of his friend, Professor R. Pumpelly, *Across America and Asia*): "To different origins we shall reasonably look for the causes which have kept the Japanese artist to flat tints and boundary lines in drawing, and have prevented his pursuing others of nature's appearances, and attempting to give the forms of things by the opposition of light and shade, or the influence of coloured light. With the harmony which belongs to all good art, Japanese works, if they do not solve the latter problem, offer at least very successful sketches of such solutions. Their coloured prints are most charmingly sensitive to the colouring that makes up the appearance of different times of day, to the relations of colour which mark the different seasons, so that their landscape effects give us, in

reality, 'the place where'—the illuminated air of the scene of action ; and what is that but what we call tone ? Like all true colourists they are curious of local colour, and of the values of light and shade ; refining upon this, they use the local colours to enhance the sensation of the time, and the very colours of the costumes belong to the hour or the season of the landscape. Eyes studious of the combinations and oppositions of colour—which must form the basis of all such representations—will enjoy these exquisite studies, of whose directness and delicacy nothing too much can be said in praise."

## CHAPTER III

### DECORATIVE PAINTINGS

MR. LA FARGE spent half at least of the year 1873 in a visit to Europe. In England he met the painters whose works he had known before ; and he exhibited a couple of pictures in London which were well received by the reviewers of the day.

He made the acquaintance of Mr. Sidney Colvin, of Ford Madox Brown, of Mr. William Rossetti, and of Sir Edward Burne Jones, among others. Of the courtesy and good-will he met he retained a grateful impression.

On the Continent he met old friends, admired the work of Puvis de Chavannes, and studied again the old glass of some of the French cathedrals, taking up anew the problems of decoration and mural painting, and of their place in architecture.

The decorative work for both private and public buildings, upon which Mr. La Farge is now principally engaged, may be said to have had its origin in his early desultory studies of architecture. "In this he had the interest of an artist, who found here 'a map of all art,' and the interest, as well, of a reader of history, a man of literary taste and acquirements." Before being called upon to undertake the wall-painting and general decoration of Trinity Church, Boston, he had long studied in the decorative direction. The two figures of *A Madonna* and *St. John*, still in the artist's possession, were parts of a large triptych begun in 1862-63 for the altar of a Catholic church. These pictures, though not accepted for the positions for which they were intended, are among the most beautiful and important of the artist's paintings. After this, La Farge gave up for a time the painting of figures, and the hope of



decorative work, and took to the study of landscape as the more evident field of modern painting. In fact, the artist was in advance of the time in America—in advance of public taste, for instance, in his sympathy with Japanese art; in advance, too, of the demand for decoration of the higher, genuinely æsthetic kind. He had long enjoyed the acquaintance of architects, and felt that, with their co-operation, the arts of painting and sculpture could regain their former and natural position. This he believed true all over the world, but especially in America, where things were less defined and jealousies less violent. He was therefore well pleased when, in 1865, he had some decorative panels to do for a gentleman's dining-room. These, too, never attained their true destination, though since exhibited as separate pictures (of fish and flowers) and adding greatly to the artist's reputation as a colourist and decorator. In 1867 the architect H. H. Richardson saw these panels and engaged the artist to undertake the first decorative work at his disposal. In 1876 came the opportunity of Trinity Church, in Boston, of which Mr. Richardson was the architect.<sup>1</sup>

This building marked a new era in American architecture. The question of describing the state of art in America at that moment is too difficult and complicated for a brief essay like this. It is sufficient to say that little of the immediate past before that moment has any value in art—certainly not as original art.

Mr. Richardson, though trained in the Paris schools, and having even practised there according to their methods, turned to new directions some while after his return to America. He found something congenial and promising in the forms and ideas of the French Southern Romanesque—felt perhaps their suggestive incompleteness, their character of ultimate promise. He used them in a free way, and Trinity Church, his first great effort, delights us all the more because we see that it was not quite calculated beforehand. It has indeed some of the charm of the *imprévu* of its predecessors in Southern France.

The secret of unity is sacrifice, and we see here how the architect has been driven to make sacrifices to his central idea, the great tower over the wide crossing. The nave certainly seems too short, but it is difficult to say to what extent the carrying out of the original plan of simple

<sup>1</sup> G. P. Lathrop in *Scribner's Magazine*.



*Head of St. John.*  
*Study for a Picture in the possession of the Rev. Cyrus Bartol, Boston.*



barrel-vaults over all four arms would have affected all the proportions, and particularly the vertical ones. That the original plan is finer there is no doubt. The trefoiled ceilings are an obvious and unsatisfactory makeshift, particularly awkward and out of style at the sweep of the great apse. Then there are concessions that look as if they were only meant to be temporary ; this is the case with the gallery and wall that block up the nave at the west end. But, in spite of all this, and of much poverty of detail—due in large part, doubtless, to the great difficulty of the time, when the architects had not at their command the trained workmen of to-day—the building has architectural character, and much of the interest and dignity that come from a broad and simple plan more or less logically carried out.

Of Mr. La Farge's connection with Richardson's work at Trinity the accompanying quotation will give an interesting account. It is from a reading of Mr. La Farge's to a society of young architects (in 1892), for whose benefit he tried to give an account of personal experiences in the use of materials:—

“Mr. Richardson had made me promise to accept some decorative work in the first building that he might control throughout. You know that even to-day the architect is only beginning to think of the artist in painting as a helper in his scheme. Some provision is made for the sculptor, because of necessary carvings of stone or wood. Correspondingly the artist of that day was chary of being again confounded with the workmen from whom he came, thereby losing the social position which he acquired by conforming to the ideas about him. Mr. Richardson desired for the Brattle Street Church in Boston an interior painted decoration, as important at least as the sculptured work of the large exterior band of bas-reliefs. In this painting Mr. George Butler was to assist me, but the scheme fell through. Six years later (September, 1876) Mr. Richardson summoned me to his bedside to say that under certain conditions the interior decoration of Trinity Church, Boston, which he was then contemplating, might be given to me. By leaving large surfaces of wall and roof space quite bare and flat he had made the necessity for decoration or decorative treatment by colour. But there was little money and little time ; I should have only a few days over four months to consider the question, to make drawings and plans,

obtain estimates, get the decision of the building committee, and carry on the work to its end. Moreover, there was no money for suitable scaffolding of this big building—the central tower is 100 feet high ; we should have to employ the scaffolding still in use for the construction and the completion of the roof and roof-tiling ; the enormous windows might not be filled in until very late in the winter, and the carpenters would be putting in their fittings while we were still at work. We had thus to face material conditions that were difficult and not devoid of personal danger ; and as all the architect's plans and measurements had been altered in the course of the work we could not avail ourselves of any such usual help to make correct drawings in advance. Sketches might help, but drawings must be made as the work went along.

“Within these conditions, more or less distinctly understood, the work was carried on. It was necessary to contract with a decorative firm to supply workmen and a competent foreman, for most of the plain wall-painting and some part of the plain ornament ; and even their work was unsatisfactorily done. The materials of the trades of decoration were purposely bad, because, as their chiefs explained to me, the fashions in decoration changed every few years, and were helped to change by the profitable decay of colours. I had to fight hand to hand with commerce ; I had to purchase myself materials of good value or high grade, and to employ other and sound methods of applying them, devised on the spot. Of the workmen employed I had to retain certain individuals who were devoted to me and to my ideas of good work ; and finally I had to finish the work with these alone. It was therefore with pleasure that I learned from Mr. Richardson some months afterwards that he had been told by the head of a prominent firm of decorators that ‘the trade accepted Mr. La Farge's work.’ The words imply a ridiculous state of things, but they were the earnest of a change for the better.”

“With the dreamy, yet protective, foresight of artists I had guessed at these difficulties, and my choice of general designs met Mr. Richardson's Romanesque building on a common ground of artistic sympathy. His chosen form of decoration, the Romanesque of Southern France, seemed to me especially suited to the constructive situation. The style was indefinite, and yet in relation with classical reasonableness and refine-



ment. It allowed the artistic veiling of ornament to pass at will from horizontal to perpendicular arrangements, and to follow loosely or with precision, as best might be, the architect's somewhat accidental surfaces, of which I had no exact measurements or plans. It would permit, as long ago it had permitted, a wide range of skill and artistic training : the rough bungling of the native and the ill-digested culture of the foreigner. I could think myself back to a time when I might have employed some cheap Byzantine of set habits, some ill-equipped Barbarian, some Roman dwelling near by for a time—perhaps even some artist keeping alive both the tradition and culture of Greece. In all the heavy prose of the actual work these analogies were verified, and I was contented with my choice of a scheme that might meet the emergencies of changing subordinates and their various aptitudes, as well as the very materials I could use.

“Richardson supported me usually, but sometimes he exacted concessions to disguise what he thought his own mistakes, which variations, being made to please him, seemed yet to me unsuitable and inadequate ; while certain concessions had to be made for merely temporary reasons—reasons no longer existing when the work was completed. Our driving hurry, increased by the necessity insisted upon by the architect of never appearing undecided, might excuse almost anything. Still there were many simple points in which for outside reasons one had to yield to the architect, whose theories and practice were limited. It will always be difficult, for instance, to have a mere architect understand that the placing of stained-glass windows in a building must largely modify colour, so that a hue which is violent in out-of-door light may become very quiet within—as we know, for instance, in the red colours used for painting brickwork.

“I do not believe that you young architects study the use of colours in decoration in any strict manner, so that my point of view would not be obvious to you as it might have been long ago. But the use of colour in architectural decoration, as we can trace it in the older work—the Greek, let us say, or even the Pompeian—is not a mere arrangement of pleasing tints. It is a manner of construction by colour.

“Colour represents what the painters call values—surfaces of a certain density or stability, to denote either the principal parts of a construction or the secondary parts. They are to us somewhat as stones might be to

you : they have the same seriousness of office. You wish a hard or a soft-looking stone according to place. . . . Colours are modulations of shadows, and therefore are like your mouldings. Colours can be made to look hard or soft, to represent plane surfaces or suggest retreating ones. You can use them to indicate the difference between a return at right angles, or upon a bevel ; and it was "from no vain nor empty thought" that the Greek coloured the ornaments of his mouldings in the manners that you know.<sup>1</sup> You will have noticed also in these same ancient examples that the proportion and the shape of the colouring represent very different manners of surfaces." . . .

"I have gone into these details to explain more fully how much of a change I proposed to make from the habits of previous decoration. I have always been impressed by one great quality, never failing in the work of the past that we care for. It may be bungling, like some of the Romanesque, for instance, or it may be extremely refined like the Greek, but it is never like our usual modern work, which suggests machinery, that is to say the absence of personality. I knew that our work at Trinity would have to be faulty, but this much I was able to accomplish—that almost every bit of it would be living, would be impossible to duplicate. I was fortunate in having the assistance of five or six men whom you know, inexperienced it is true, but artists, and as far as possible their hands and mine worked over even the commonest details of ornament quite as much as the more pretentious figure painting. In fact, I frequently took for myself the passages of ornament most often slurred over because of their presumed humility.

. . . . "Thus we may be said to have turned the sharp corner of a new path, which of course is the old." . . . "We had a difficult time of it as you may well suppose. Every physical discomfort was against us, and, moreover, there was the necessity of using improvised methods, and of employing material made up for the occasion which yet should be lasting, and all this in what I may call a frantic hurry. At the end we had to work both night and day, and were only able to guess at what might be the result when the scaffolding should come down."

This quotation tells the story sufficiently. The circumstances recall

<sup>1</sup> Compare Mr. Charles Henry's scientific explanation of the Greek use of blue, for instance. *Revue Indépendante*. 1888.

conditions under which many of the prototypes of this church were built and adorned long ago in mediæval times. To-day the impressiveness of both the building and its artistic adornment is much hurt by an enormous ecclesiastical chandelier which contradicts all the lines of composition, and hides many important surfaces. The decoration of the nave was most thoughtfully, elaborately, and carefully carried out, so as to give greater apparent length to this part of the building and remedy somewhat one of its main deficiencies. This is all set at naught by filling in the two corners at the west end of the nave by huge and unsightly organs, which could easily be placed elsewhere. By a kindred mischance, French glass, garish and vulgar, and English glass of mediocre quality fill most of the windows. Trinity Church is thus an epitome of the contrasts of America ; the aspirations and the bad taste, the splendid gifts and the wilful neglect, the great opportunities and the marring haste.

The historic interest of Trinity Church has tempted me to linger over the subject, and I have the less space to speak of Mr. La Farge's later decorative work.

His work at Trinity Church was but just finished when Mr. La Farge was asked to decorate St. Thomas's in New York City ; this work he carried out during the summer and autumn of the year 1877. I quote again Mr. Lathrop :

“ Here, in two compositions somewhat disturbed by the pentagonal line of the apsis, he has depicted with great beauty two scenes from the Resurrection ; the first, on the left hand, is founded on the account in St. Matthew, where the keepers ‘ did shake, and became as dead men,’ on the appearance of the angel at the sepulchre. The introduction of a sarcophagus, instead of the rock-tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, though not without precedent, is, perhaps, something to be questioned ; but that the artist has infused into his whole imagining the solemnity, the wondrous ‘ fear and great joy ’ of the touching story, this can hardly be questioned by any one possessing a spontaneous yet trained perception. An absence of sophistication, a primitive reverence, makes itself felt in all parts. Who can fail to see that the religious awe of the situation finds an echo in the very foliage of the light wood, and in the white gleam of dawn at the pathway's end ? A reredos in alto relievo, modelled by St. Gaudens, intervening between this and the other picture, brings

groups of kneeling angels, rank on rank, supporting the cross, to carry out the prevalent mood of the painter's compositions. The second fresco refers to the last chapter of Luke, where the three Maries meet the two angels. The management of the colour in this piece is bolder and more stirring than in the other, as befits the supernatural episode. How fine that rolling gloom of darkly mingled tints, in the falling land of the background ! Both, viewed from the places of the congregation, seem to float off into an atmosphere of the visionary and unapproachable, tinged with some ray of divination, going beyond the real, yet arresting the real aspect, also, and fixing it in a dimly luminous beauty. A word must here be added concerning the enframing ornament, the pilasters, and the cornice above, all of which were devised by the artist to create a suitable environment. A scroll pattern, superbly coloured and completed by means of iridescent pearly shell, let into the wood in bits, is one element of this decoration which, so far as is known to the present writer, has not been used elsewhere. By painting over the chancel windows, Mr. La Farge has gained still another tributary splendour for his *ensemble*. One must be grateful to the artist who brings the earthly sense of beauty into sweet and pathetic accord with heavenly aspirations, as it has been done here.

“It is an interesting fact that a painter who is not yet reckoned among our older artists was really one of the first to lead in the new path which art is taking in America. Our young men come back from Munich and Paris, and find an artist at home who has long been painting in what is popularly called ‘the new style.’ He was, moreover, not only, as already stated, the first of our artists of marked ability to execute religious paintings for the walls of our churches, but he was the first who brought to bear a true artistic taste and handling upon every detail of architectural decoration. Mention has been made of this phase of his work in Trinity Church. In the work upon the chancel of St. Thomas’s, not only is the design the leading artist’s, but so also is a great portion of the execution, even to a part of the carving. All the architectural mouldings and the entire woodwork were done from Mr. La Farge’s drawings and under his eye, and some of it by his own hands. So genuine, indeed, has been the spirit in which he has carried on his decorative work, that it is evidently no mere wave of imitation



coming over from France or England ; but it manifests to the European student of modern art not only an original and individual sentiment, but points of absolute novelty."

It is to be regretted that the entire design was never completed ; apparently from want of money. There are yet wanting the pillars



*Memorial Cross and Tomb at Newport, R.I.*

bracketed out from the wall which were to stand on either side of the central bas-relief and to frame the Bishop's chair. The crowning cornice of the wall decoration was never carried out. Thus the two principal features of the architectural motive are absent, and notwithstanding the success of the work as it stands at present, it is to be supposed that the artist must consider it far from what he had proposed to himself.



The year during which these paintings and decorations were carried out was an extremely busy one in other ways. Mr. La Farge had begun to consider very seriously the problems of work in glass which ended by absorbing all his attention. So that other decorative work was more or less abandoned, except in a few cases where there was a necessity for undertaking both together. I have devoted the whole of the next chapter to his more especial achievement in glass. This represents fully ten years of study and continuous effort that have resulted in the creation of a new art.

It must have cost the painter in Mr. La Farge no little sorrow to abandon, even in part, the practice of the thing that he cared for most. He must have realised how difficult it would be to take it up again after long disuse, because success in the technicalities of painting is so closely dependent upon constant execution. Yet any painting might have seemed to him a mode of relaxation and amusement.

With Mr. La Farge's decorative work at this time, about 1878, I am not fully acquainted. At Portland, Maine, there is a small church which he decorated, as I understand, very simply. There is also the Congregational Church in Newport, Rhode Island, the interior of which he painted, paying great attention to a local feeling which opposed ecclesiastical adornments; so that the artistic problem there carried out was that of giving a church effect without recalling any traditional motives or symbolism. As a labour of love Mr. La Farge filled all the windows with glass of finest quality of material. These beautiful windows were injured during the great hail-storm of August, 1894. Their patching by some village practitioner now presents a curious analogy to the cheap repairs in ancient cathedrals of Europe; a likeness all the more striking because of the enormous wealth and luxury of this centre of American society.

For Newport also, and at the same time, Mr. La Farge built the little sepulchral monument of which I give a picture. It was an attempt at carrying out certain special desires, and is in that way very far removed from the usual conventions. It was most carefully followed out by Mr. La Farge, and by his friend, Mr. St. Gaudens, the sculptor, who devoted to this very personal creation the extreme refinement and exquisite mastery that have since made him famous.





*The Arrival of the Magi.*

*Right-hand Panel of the Painting in the Church of the Incarnation, New York.*





The decoration of the interior of the so-called Brick Church in New York in 1882, is planned just from the opposite point of that one followed in the little Newport church. The problem was to so alter a formal and unchurchlike hall, as to emphasise most distinctly its being intended for Christian service, and to do this upon the spaces of the existing architectural decoration.

Here again, long after the work was done, the colour of the walls has been changed, destroying entirely the colour relations established by the artist, which were meant to give both solemnity and an abundance of light.

In the chancel of the Church of the Incarnation, Mr. La Farge painted two large panels which are placed in the decoration designed and carried out by his son, Mr. C. Grant La Farge, the architect, and Mr. George L. Heins, his partner. These paintings are taken from sections of the design which Mr. La Farge had made years before for the chancel of Trinity Church, Boston, and were painted during the autumn of 1885. The right hand panel is given on page 41. The subject is the Arrival of the Wise Men from the East.

In America, as elsewhere to-day, it is rare to find the authority and lustre of a great artistic name and the charm of the highest culture contributing to the adornment of private life. Besides the glass of many houses, Mr. La Farge has also done work on the walls and ceilings of some residences. Of these I know only a few cases, notably the decoration of certain rooms and galleries in the great house of Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt. Of some of the glass I shall speak further on. Some changes to be mentioned later make it difficult to describe the work in full. Besides decorative glass of varied designs in every window, there were whole sets of embroideries executed under the artist's supervision and from his designs by assistants expressly trained by him. The vaulted ceiling of a small gallery bore the subjects dear to painters,—Night and Day, and the Seasons. There was also the carved and inlaid woodwork of the great dining-room, and the inlaid panels and mouldings of its ceilings, remarkable for the combination of Eastern craftsmanship and Western motives resumed in an entirely personal rendering. Their subjects are classical. Four of the figure subjects (one of which is given

on the opposite page), are nearly life-size. The settings are mouldings of carved wood and hand-wrought bronzes of precious alloys made from the recipes brought from Japan by the artist's friend Mr. Raphael Pumpelly.

The ground of the panels is of red mahogany ; the inlays are ivory, pear-wood, Sienna marbles, soft green serpentine, silver, mother-of-pearl, and coral, and hammered bronzes of various Japanese alloys. The language of the decoration, if I may say so, is thus Japanese ; but in a paraphrase as untrammelled and free as the accompanying use of classical themes ; yet it is less of the Renaissance in style than in spirit and character. Notwithstanding the extraordinary richness of the materials the effect is sober and peaceful like that of the Japanese inlaid lacquers and woods,—Mr. La Farge's special love and study. To-day most of this work has been scattered about the building, and is set in other surroundings and much spoiled by the mechanical alterations and additions of others.

In 1887, Mr. La Farge took up painting again, and on his return from a visit to Japan he painted the large altar-piece or end wall in the Church of the Ascension (New York). The studies for the landscape of this great work were made in Japan ; and indeed it is as decidedly a landscape as a figure subject. This will be seen in the photograph that we reproduce on page 47. Mere black and white can give but a faint notion of the wonderful harmony and spiritual suggestion of the colour. Our illustration, however, will indicate the composition and the arrangement of lines and masses. These main lines in the landscape have been filled in with subtleties of nature, with the rendering of as many facts as might give the illusion of a well-remembered scene. Within this simulated reality, giving the appearance of unpremeditated record, is placed the story. Here the traditional arrangement is insisted upon, and the masses of light and dark are made to emphasise the convention ; while in the details the artist has trusted to his power of expressing emotion naturally. It is this touch of the unexpected and yet truly human, that gives such charm to many of Mr. La Farge's works. Wit-

<sup>1</sup> These four panels, the subjects being Ceres, Pomona, Bacchus and Vertumnus, were modelled by Mr. St. Gaudens, as only he could have done them, from Mr. La Farge's designs.





*Pomona.*

*Carved and inlaid Panel in Dining room of the House of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Esq., New York.*



ness the sentiment and attitude of the mother of our Lord stretching out her hands in farewell and longing. Our imagination is no less appealed to by the glory or halo of angels who emerge from the clouds of the landscape, clothed in similar iridescent tones, as if, however real at the moment, they might again be resolved into moist air and dewy distance,



*The Ascension.*

*Painting in the Chancel of the Church of the Ascension, New York.*

symbols, as it were, of the glorifying of Christ by Nature.

This painting has made a profound impression upon the religious and artistic public, and is perhaps the artist's most important work.

Notwithstanding the long studies which preceded its execution it must have been most rapidly painted, for within this same year, besides many smaller things, most important glass work and other decoration,

Mr. La Farge painted also the two very large pictures each twenty feet long, in Mr. Whitelaw Reid's music-room, one of which is here reproduced. The subjects were *Music* and *The Drama*—treated, as a critic has remarked, “like a garden masquerade.”

I do not know of any other decorative painting by him done between 1888 and the present year. This year Mr. La Farge begins the decoration of the chancel in the great basilica of the Paulist Fathers in New York. The wall surfaces are very large, and the space devoted to figure-painting alone will make a panel nearly a hundred feet long by over thirty feet high. There will be five windows (twenty-six feet high) and above a large half dome. For the colouring and distribution of lines in this church Mr. La Farge made a scheme some years ago. Wherever it has been carried out the result has been of great dignity, but the church is marred by ugly additions, especially in the side-chapels, apparently the gifts of parishioners forced upon a suffering public. Still it is to be hoped that art of the importance of Mr. La Farge's may redeem the vulgarity of other things, and perhaps set the key for great work.



*Music. From a Painting in the Residence of the Hon. Whitelaw Reid, New York.*



## CHAPTER IV.

### WORK IN GLASS.

I HAVE thought it best, for motives of convenience, to treat Mr. La Farge's glass in a separate chapter. The preceding chapters will have shown that it is not to be thought of as disconnected from the rest of his work. It was born of practical needs, and is only a carrying into other fields of the principles, ideals, and preferences that have guided and informed all his other work.

About twenty years ago, when this artist of genius began to turn his attention to improving the state of decorative art in America, he found that if he wished to include windows in his scheme, he must give his personal attention to the making of their material from the beginning. By working with his own hands, like the artist of an older day, and by means of many patient experiments, carried out in pursuance of a logical plan, and not merely the result of chance, he succeeded in re-discovering certain processes, and inventing others in which his unequalled power as a colourist found full expression. His earliest efforts were entirely successful, and his first windows as good as anything he has done since. If novelty in methods of art allows the artist to carry out more thoroughly the principles that underlie his art, then that novelty is a laudable one, it is an improvement, because at the same time that it is new it keeps, or should keep, what is best of the old. A certain resemblance to ancient art, as well as extreme novelty in his work disconcerted many people, but soon it was recognised and admired, and at once imitated by every worker in glass; so much so that there has not been an important example of this art produced by others since he began to work which does not, consciously or unconsciously, derive much



of its merit from inspirations and processes which he originated. To use the words of the artists who judged the window which he exhibited at the French Exhibition of 1889, and for which he was given the Legion of Honour :

“His work cannot be fully gauged here, where a single window represents a name the most celebrated and widely known in our Sister-Republic. He is the great innovator, the inventor of opaline glass. He has created in all its details an art unknown before, an entirely new industry, and in a country without traditions, he will begin one followed by thousands of pupils filled with the same respect for him that we have ourselves for our own masters. To share in this respect is the highest praise that we can give to this great artist.” (*Reports of the International Jury of the Exhibition of 1889. Group III, page 179.*)

The history of the difficulties and circumstances that led to the invention is best given in the artist-workman's own words ; I shall make use in part of a statement prepared at the request of Mr. S. Bing of Paris, for his report to the French Government in 1893, since it is an advantage to listen to workmen whenever we can get them to talk about their own work.

. . . . “It was only in 1872, during a trip to Europe, that I thought much again of the question of decoration, that is to say, in so far as returning to its practice. I had naturally taken a great interest, both in early days and up to that date, in the English pre-Raphaelite school begun by Ford Madox Brown and Rossetti, and at that time (in 1873) distinguished by Mr. Burne Jones. I saw then something of their work and their methods in stained glass, and the ancient Mediæval glass again became a subject of interest. I happened on my return home to be asked by an architect for the design of a stained glass window. I thought that I had noticed in 1873, in the work of the English artists in stained glass, that they seemed to have come to the end of their rope, and that their work in glass had ceased improving ; and it seemed to me that the cause of this was mainly because the designers had become separated from the men who made the actual windows. I do not mean separated in sympathy, but that they no longer followed the mechanism now that they had learned it, and consequently that whatever they did was only expressed in the

manner that had first been used for their designs. Moreover, they made designs for the drawing, not for the result, thus giving beautiful designs and poorer results. It occurred to me that if I made a design for stained glass to be carried out in this country, I should follow the entire manufacture, selecting the colours myself, and watching every detail. . . . I attempted then to carry out the first design which suited the architect—and I found at once that the most ordinary English methods were all that were known, and that they were carried out in a vastly inferior manner. There were no good painters on glass, even of a fairly low degree, and the choice of glass was extremely limited. We received here only the poorer and less artistic samples of material, the better being carefully culled by the good European workers, and, moreover, as all importations were commercial, they were made, as they are always made, to appeal to the largest and widest mediocrity of taste.

“I had struggled with the making of my window, hoping by ingenious balances of tones and colour to meet this question of a small range of colours and material, and also by what is called ‘plating,’ that is to say, placing one glass upon another, so as to enrich my stock of tones. The results were not successful to my mind, though they were enough to interest me, and to make me believe that a good deal could be done by two factors—the one a very careful designing of the leads which link the glass together, so that the general pattern involved a handsome arrangement of lead lines; the other factor, the use of complementary colour contrast, through which contrast the shadows and half tones and modelling of the figure and background were to be obtained, increased in range by this system of ‘plating’ or ‘double’ glasses. All this I had tried to use in my window, thereby obtaining a certain character, but the difficulty of proper painting to supply gradation in the glass limited me at the very moment when I tried to get away from the very baldest methods of pictorial effect. I had abandoned the matter for a time, when the late H. H. Richardson, the great architect, came to me with a project for painting Trinity Church, in Boston, which he had just built. I had, to make all the designs and carry out the execution of the decoration of this very big church, only four months. As Mr. Richardson was a friend, and believed in me, and hoped for something new from me, I undertook the work and carried it

out upon novel lines, all of which new directions, however, I believed to be intimately connected with past work. Only the old methods would have been too inferior in every particular, because of the extraordinary want of time, because of having no trained workmen, and no trained artists to assist me. . . . Though I knew beforehand that I must be dissatisfied with the result, I was comforted with the portion of success which I attained, and by the feeling that the proper way to do work was to make it meet the necessities of the country, and, if necessary, to invent such methods as would be needed. If others were used they would be necessarily inferior to European work, because, all the way from the higher designs to the last workman, we would be on a lower level, incapable of comparison with the higher. I made also for this church a certain number of designs for glass in the uppermost windows (a height of eighty feet), designs that I thought could be carried out fairly well, because at that height mere general lines and masses might be used, and the problem would so come more to a certain resemblance to Mediæval work. I tried also, by painting a Grisaille window, to see what effect methods of using mere varying opacities of paint in lines of different sizes might secure, but I had not any distinct wish to go on with glass. . . .

“During the same year which had seen me busy with Trinity, I was ill, and during my illness, amused myself by combining various tones of glass by plating. My mind reverted again to the poverty of the material itself as furnished us, when looking at some toilet articles made of what is called ‘opal glass’ in imitation of china, I noticed the beauty of quality which accompanied this fabric. I mean only in the *unsuccessful* pieces which alone are opalescent. I also saw that when alongside of coloured glass (what we call ‘pot-metal’<sup>1</sup> or the usual stained glass), the opalescent quality brought out a certain harmony

<sup>1</sup> . . . “Glass which is coloured in its body while molten is called pot-metal : and it is to this division especially that the words ‘stained glass’ are inaccurately applied in ordinary phrase. The expression ‘stained glass,’ which is used for all kinds of coloured glass, when used exactly, is of extremely limited application. It refers to a transparent colour which is fastened to the surface of glass by the action of heat. It will be well for the inexperienced reader to remember that ‘painted glass’ means glass that has paints made of enamels fused to the surface of the glass by means of heat, whether that glass be coloured in its substance, or relatively white.”



THE INFANT SAMUEL

(Four copies: part of window in the Julian Tower of Church  
New York.)





due to its suggestion of complementary colour ; that mysterious quality it has of showing a golden yellow, associated with violet ; a pink flush brought out on ground of green. It seemed to me that all that was necessary to obtain the density which we made by painting, and at the same time be always within reach of a colour harmony, would be the having material of this kind, made first without colour aid, and then with variations of colour. Moreover, the infinite variety of modulations possible in glass of similar makes to the opal allowed a degree of light and shade for each piece of glass which not only would give modelling, but also increase the depth of tone sufficiently at places, to make the darker parts melt softly into the harsh lead line that binds each piece. As soon as I was out of bed, I bought a quantity of objects made in this opal glass with the idea of cutting out from them various pieces and trying them in ordinary windows. By chance some person asked me to design a window. This I carried out and then I amused myself by replacing certain ones of the patterns that had the ordinary pot-metal, with these pieces of opal cut from the various boxes and such like. The effect of a contrast of solidity with relative thinness, and the play of complementary tone suggested by the opal alongside of the other colours was so pleasant that I felt convinced that here was a possible new departure which would at least give me a handsome material irrespective of what I hoped for beyond. . . . I then began to work glass on a very small scale with a single workman in the same studio where I painted. I had noticed the difference of facility in the way of cutting the different shapes of glass, and how much this was affected by the materials, their density, their irregularity of construction, and their surfaces. I felt all the more like carrying out the making of opal glass in different tones for use in windows. . . . I found a glassmaker, who was willing to try with me, at my expense, and all our first experiments were more or less successful. Within a few weeks I managed to get enough variations to justify me in accepting the making of a large window for a private house. . . . I used in this first window (and I have continued more or less in windows of mere ornament, as this was), whatever glass I could find of any manufacture whatever, English, Belgian, or American, opalescent or non-opalescent. The contrasts of density and transparency have always been very interesting to me, and

in this first window the basis of my idea was in a large way the recall of the inlays of precious stones that are set in jade by Eastern artists. I should add, before going further, that previous to these experiments in making opalescent glass of different hues and qualities of structures, I had imported such best English glass as I could get. Had I been able to get what I knew existed, that is to say, glass of fine tone, and with some modulations of colour, I might have delayed, but the whole basis of importation was so strictly commercial that I was quite unsatisfied. Using these combinations of opalescent and non-opalescent glass, I accepted some more orders for different varieties of windows (many for houses) and of very different character, and I entered into an arrangement with Herter and Company to make all their glass, an arrangement which lasted several years; until 1882, I think. Immediately I had begun making memorial windows for large buildings, churches, and others. In 1878 I had undertaken one of the most important windows I have ever carried out, the so-called Battle window, a memorial of one of the classes of Harvard College, now in the Memorial Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts. In this window I used almost every variety of glass that could serve, and even precious stones, such as amethysts and the like, and I began to represent effects of light and modulation of shadow by using streaked glass, glass of several colours blended, and glass wrinkled into forms, as well as glass cut into shapes, or blown into forms. I also painted the glass very much and carefully in certain places; so that in a rough way this window is an epitome of all the varieties of glass that I have seen used before or since. There was even glass into which other glass had been deposited in patterns, a beautiful form of material which has never been fully developed for these uses to my knowledge. The only method which I did not employ was one that I began shortly after, and which was the use of glass, fused together in patterns without leads, a method which, not being encouraged I have used very little, though that also is susceptible of enormous development. Nor did I use in this window another method which I have since used in connection with glass cut into patterns and fused together, and that is a sort of variation of *cloisonné* made through joining glass by thin filaments of metal fused to the glass and plated on both sides with different surfaces of glass adhering. By it I have been

able to model faces in much detail, bringing pieces together so small, that many of them could be placed on the nail of the little finger, and several thousand could be joined together in a surface less than a foot square. The method being costly, and necessitating personal control of



*The Old Philosopher.*  
*Mosaic and Cloisonné Glass Window in the*  
*Crane Memorial Library, Quincy, Mass.*

the furnace, I was obliged to abandon it almost entirely, all the more because of an indifference of both the architects and the public ; moreover, to any one designing himself in great detail, or seeing designs executed and carried out in the methods which I have adopted, it

became more and more difficult to be at the glass-house or direct and superintend the making of material."

The preceding extracts will have shown how the invention and perfecting of this new method of art was simply forced upon the artist by circumstances, as soon as he began to think seriously about decoration. To what he says about the poverty of material imported and the inferiority of workmanship available at the time, I must add, that English glass must be very good indeed not to look anæmic in the strong American light.

American glass has indeed one serious drawback ; it makes terrible demands on the man that touches it. Like the violin it can only be handled by artists. But unfortunately eyes are not so susceptible to the difference between discord and harmony as ears. This is especially noticeable in American windows, as all Europeans can bear witness who have puzzled over the enormous difference in their quality. Some of it can bear comparison with the best mediæval glass work, much of it is as poor and vulgar as a cheap tune played carelessly on the piano, while some of the unpretentious ornamental glass shows real sense of colour harmony. It seems inconceivable that all this can exist side by side, that people do not feel the discord. As I am writing of the La Farge glass, I can leave all further comparisons aside, and go on detailing the steps by which the La Farge invention was made into the splendid instrument that we now know.

One of the great privileges of my life has been the opportunity kindly accorded me of watching some of the processes of the workshop. My account of this work is thus founded on a basis of personal observation.

In some respects these mechanical methods are the same to-day as they were in the early middle ages. In this modern workshop preparatory sketches and studies are made, some in colour, and others in black and white or pencil. Whatever the design, whether a Bible story full of meaning, or a mere ornamental pattern, from these drawings are determined the shapes of the cutting of the glass, and they must therefore be well considered from this point of view, with an amount of care which no outsider can gauge. Since the work that is to follow is based on them, their manner of preparation must have many considerations, not



only in the necessary selection of line for composition and arrangement of structure for the leading, but also for the complicated questions of irradiation<sup>1</sup> and complementary colour contrast. The problem resembles the questions of construction in architecture which are an integral part of the architect's decorative design.

“ Usually the drawings or cartoons, that is to say, the drawings made by artists for their windows, look so much better than the windows when we see them reproduced in the magazines. This is the converse of what ought to be ; it is as if the written score should have more sound than the music played from it, the pencil sketch be richer, more full of material and wealth of execution than the finished picture. But this we must recognise as a general failure of modern decorative work. The design, the sketch, the cartoon is always better than the completed work. It is again in great part the result of commercial habits. The sketch is made to sell from or to exhibit. The work may take care of itself. One of the good things of our American materials and of their methods of use, is that it is more difficult to make a pretty drawing for the client, because of the evident inadequacy of the drawing to represent the richness of the material in which the completed work is to be carried out. Nor could any of our drawings, nor even an elaborate painting represent the delicate relations of tone given by the American material. A window of the kind that we have inaugurated may be almost colourless in so far that it may be all white and grey. But we can produce such varieties of whites and greys, so many contrasts of dulness and brilliancy, such suggestions of colour as white mother-of-pearl, that we can go as far in delicacy as we can in power.”

From these studies are prepared full-sized cartoons, often in colour,

<sup>1</sup> Some of my readers will know all that I refer to ; others may be helped by such an explanation as I attempt to make. In decoration by glass, whether painted or not, we meet with a well-known phenomenon, less known, less visible to the painter who paints pictures on canvas or walls. The artist who uses a piece of blue glass, for instance, where the painter in oil uses a touch or more of blue paint, will find his piece of blue glass change its size and shape at a distance, as the opaque colour would not. If he uses other colours, their shapes and sizes, their distinctness and their tones, are all modified by distance. Naturally, too, placed alongside of each other, they not only change in themselves, but they change the appearance of their neighbours.



giving a careful indication of the values in light and dark ; and a complete set of enlarged lead lines. From these lead lines are made two transfers on paper and one tracing on glass. This is the so-called "glass frame" which is set up in the wall against the direct light from outside. Meanwhile one of the paper transfers has been cut up into pieces representing the shapes of the pieces of glass. They are carefully numbered and put together again on the wall.

The work in glass now begins. Consulting his colour sketch, the artist decides what passages of colour are to strike the keynote of the harmony, has his glass cut from the corresponding pieces of paper patterns, fastens the pieces of glass to the glass frame by wax, and then proceeds to



*Angels : in the lower part of a circular Mosaic Glass Window in the Second Presbyterian Church, Chicago, in course of preparation.*

build his whole scheme of colour on this beginning. The work is thus from the outset a transposition, a painting with glass by an artist in glass. The occasional slightness of the colour sketch is a first thing that strikes the layman ; a thin wash of yellow running into purple is enough to indicate a rich drapery of glowing orange with long lines of purple trembling in the shadow of the folds ; pale green is translated into a rich opalescence of green and silver and gold, blue into deep modulated sapphire and violet. The slighter the sketch, the better may be the result. There can be no rule. The very incompleteness and suggestiveness of a sketch is sometimes a source of inspiration to the executant.

Contrariwise it may be that the complete intention of the design has to be made out by many subsidiary cartoons and paintings. That is the fortune of war. "It is then necessary that the artist in charge should be a trained painter accustomed to make many supplementary studies, and the increased work will not seem to him many times more than that which he would give to painting in other materials, such as oil painting."

Occasionally the colour sketch only serves as a starting point, as a general indication of what the artist meant. The basis of the harmony of a colour-scheme is usually determined by the first chord struck. As this is necessarily much fuller and richer than anything that can be produced by pigment on paper, so the whole harmony aimed at is transposed into a richer and fuller key. From the commencement the artist and his skilful workman labour together, selecting at first the principal masses, as much in the primaries as seems feasible, until a basis of the whole composition is chosen for the first joining by leads. In this first selection there may be a great number of changes made, with a certain amount of plating, as the different masses come together, but simplicity is aimed at, as in an under-painting on canvas.

The window is now taken down in sections and leaded together on the bench over the second drawing referred to above. Again it is put in the light, and now by means of "platings,"<sup>1</sup> to modify tones and bring passages together, it is rehandled and completed. Our illustration shows a window in this state, before the final leading; that is to say, the joining of all these pieces of glass together by a lead ribbon with flanges. The whole work is thus the result of the most intimate collaboration between the brain of the artist and the skilled hand and trained senses of the executant.

Painting with enamel in the ordinary way *upon* the glass has thus been dispensed with by painting *with* glass. The work has become a form of translucent mosaic held together by lead instead of cement as in mosaic. But the hands, heads, and faces of figures are usually painted upon the glass.

<sup>1</sup> Plating means the placing of one piece of glass upon another of the same shape so as to vary its colour or its depth, or the variation of modelling.

First of all reasons, it is because in them expression, an element of design and not of colour, must always be the principal aim.

"However," says Mr. La Farge, "in the anxiety for a thoroughly logical system of doing without any painting, a method was invented by me of joining glass without lead, by melting, or of joining exceedingly minute divisions of glass, small as those cut by the jeweller, with threads of finer metal, so that these should become almost invisible at a distance. But the costliness of the process and the great risk involved in firing, with the then rude appliances of the American workshop, prevented this method from going further than a few examples. The architects also, and clients, had not enough experience and knowledge to appreciate such a refinement, and there still remains an entire division of this great art of glass to be explored."

These tendencies to logical results, however, have never prevented Mr. La Farge's use of enamel painting upon all or any surfaces for certain windows, just as the same might have been employed at any previous time. The large windows of Trinity Church, which I shall notice presently, are so painted, as are also the Harvard memorials and the Vanderbilt staircase windows.

We can see that the demand upon the foreman or executant is great. "If I have explained what has been done and what can be done in glass, the coming men will require, not only to know the art of the past, down to its ornamentation, but they will have to undertake the solution, along with the new painters, of all the new problems of light and colour, or else, if that be too much for them, to restudy carefully the methods of the past.

"My idea of encouragement, as I said before, is that of placing great responsibilities on those who are worthy. It is true that a powerful artist will be able to employ, as he has always done, capacities covering smaller fields than his own; and in such aggregations of capacities will lie the development of the art. This is not to say that the less ambitious forms of decorative art will not be open to all sincere workers; the great point being that the limitations should be distinctly understood. One of the lessons taught us every day by Oriental art, especially by the art of Japan, is that there is a place for every one in art, provided that he keeps entirely within his capacities and his knowledge. The humble Japanese



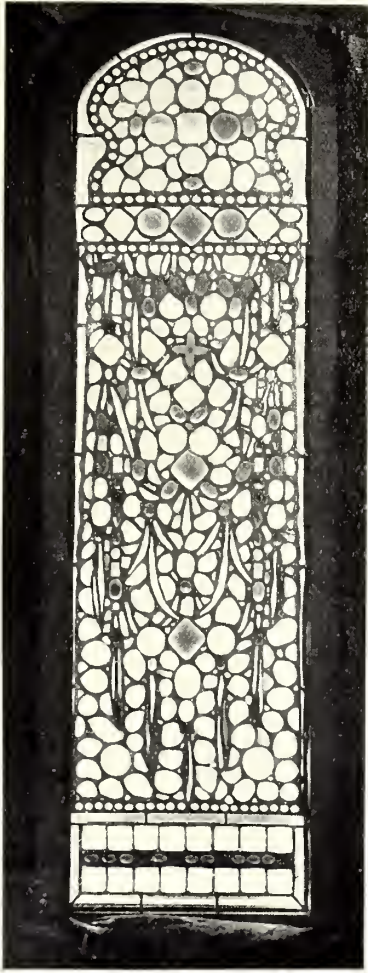
SKETCH FOR THE ANGEL OF HELE.

*In the Angel Memorial Window, Unitarian Church, North Eaton, Mass.*





artist who copies with love and intelligence the design of the better designer is irreproachable. It would only be in assuming that because he could execute he could also invent that he would fail. Hence the great charm of such work as the Italian workers in pottery carried on in



*Mosaic Glass Window. Jewels and pressed Glass.  
In the Residence of W. H. Vanderbilt, Esq.*

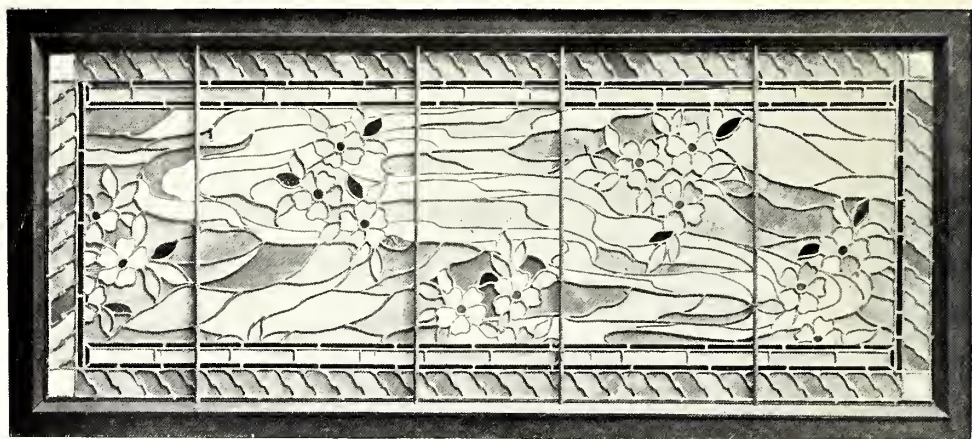


*Mosaic Glass Doorlight.  
In the Residence of D. O. Mills, Esq.*

imitation, sometimes in actual copy, of the work of the greater designers. They naturally translated the design in the course of its application to new materials, and the result was original creation."

" . . . In our work here, if nothing else had been accomplished, I

for one should feel pleased that certain artisans have been trained, owing to the difficult requirements of the profession, to a point of capacity and interest in artistic work that makes them artists without their losing the character of the workman. Of this the public can know nothing; they hear only of the artist in control. Yet the foreman answers a requirement as serious as any that are met by the foremost painter of to-day, when his sure grasp of the principles of colour and design allows him not only to interpret a faint sketch so as to arrange its colour in proper harmonies,<sup>1</sup> but also to use the theory of complementary colour contrast for the modelling of surfaces, for the differences of planes, for making any



*Mosaic Glass Window. Ordinary work, simple cutting.*

part of the design recede or advance. And that there are such artisans with us, who have been formed out of nothing, and with no previous education, is the best hope of possible advancement."

Of necessity the designing and making of windows of mere ornament has occupied a great part of Mr. La Farge's practice. Their number can be counted in thousands, from the simplest arrangement of lines and spaces to the most careful designs in arabesque or semi-naturalistic flower patterning.

<sup>1</sup> In writing this I am thinking of Mr. Thomas Wright, of the New York Decorative Stained Glass Company, in Washington Square, who has no equal in the management of colour in glass.



Many of those placed in churches have been made to fill temporarily the openings ; until richer work, often memorials, could replace them. They are none the less interesting.

The very plain windows executed by Mr. La Farge, or under his

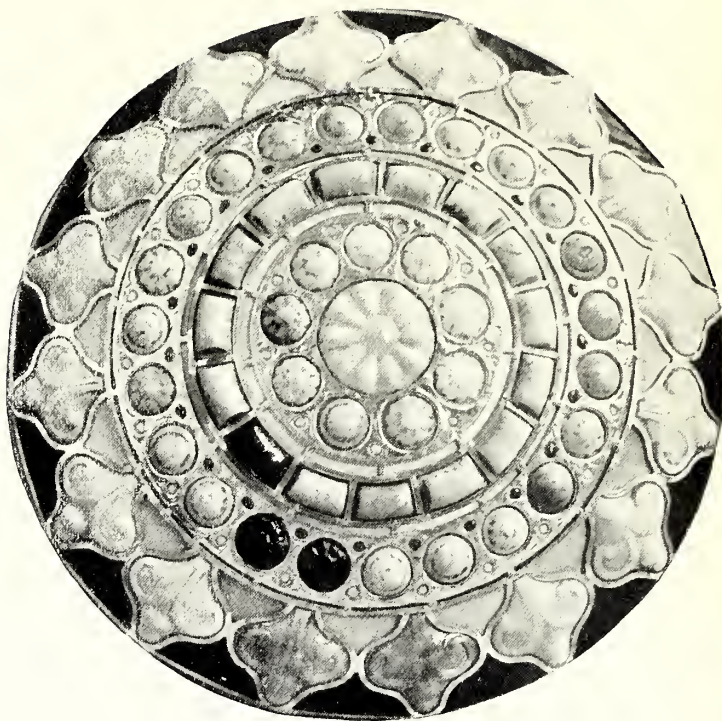


*Part of a Mosaic Glass Window.*

direction, have elements of a beauty which can only co-exist with extreme simplicity. They are interesting also in the use of expedients to solve the problem of economy that is constantly presenting itself. Conventional forms that can be cut more easily are of course more economical

than irregular ones which need particular skill and care in the cutting of each piece. Now the need for economy in unimportant places and in windows where cost has to be specially considered, is very great in the case of the La Farge glass, from the necessary costliness of the processes and materials.

Herein the make of the glass invented by Mr. La Farge plays itself

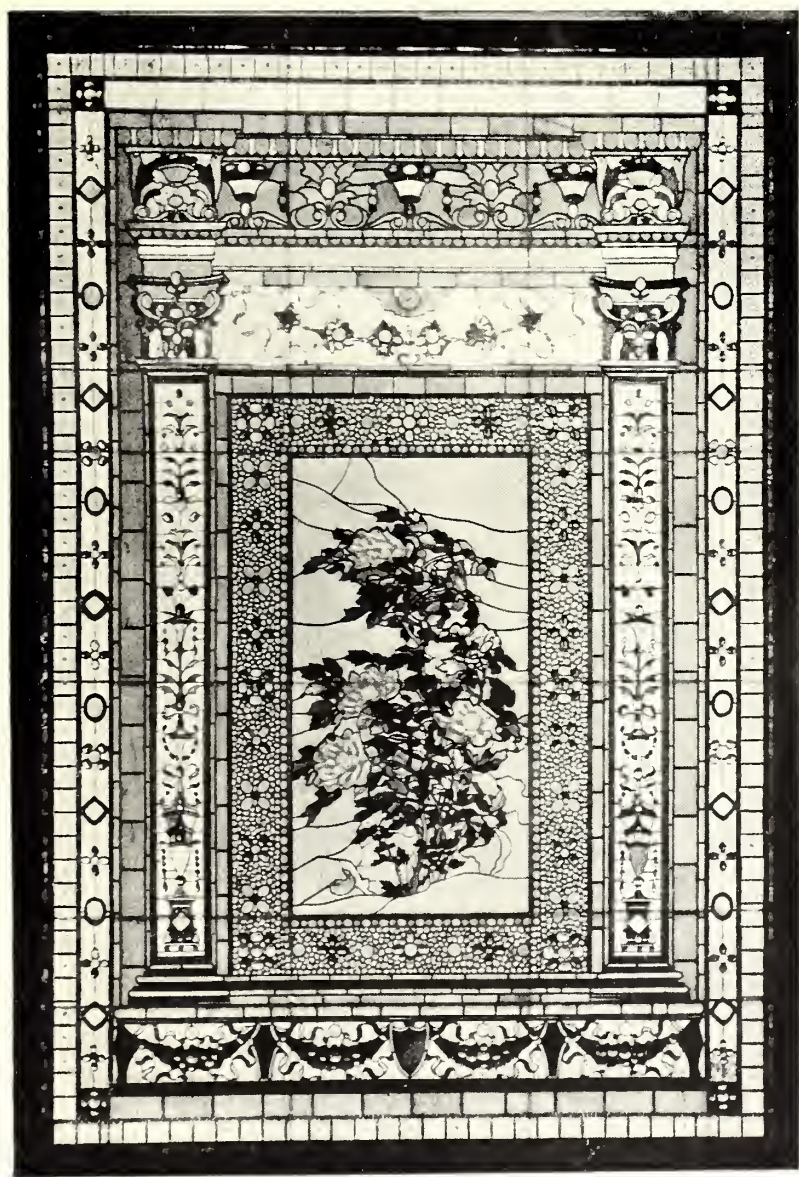


*Mosaic Glass Window. Pressed and dropped Glass.*

an important part. The density, the richness, or exquisiteness of material gives to plain spaces an interest of their own. We are reminded of the charm that Oriental work has in its use of large surfaces of colour bordered or broken by refined ornament.

It is essential to the right comprehension of American glass to understand that it has grown out of and educated a real demand: the demand for memorial windows in the many churches of the cities and towns of





*Mosaic Glass Window in the Residence of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Esq.,  
New York.*



America, a demand that is felt by those who can afford to spend a small sum for a memorial, as well as by those who can afford an almost unlimited amount. There is enormous wealth in America, but the highest form of luxury, art patronage in the right spirit, is as yet only



*Mosaic Glass Window in the Residence of Cornelius  
Vanderbilt, Esq., New York.*

known to a few ; therefore much force is wasted in contriving that might be expended in creating.

The necessity for economy in producing work that shall not be costly and yet have quality, be carried out by others and yet have personal



*Mosaic Glass Window in the Residence of Frederick  
L. Ames, Esq., Boston.*

character, has been fruitful of good results in a real advance of the methods of execution by trained assistants.

Mr. La Farge's earliest work in ornament differs only from that of to-day in his not having then developed some refinements of make, and in the ruder cutting, more like the European (because he had not yet had time to train men in the new way), and also, as he has explained above, in a more parsimonious use of the opal glass. His very earliest windows are purely ornamental: one of the first he made is based on Japanese metal open work, in which the leads form the decorative basis.

Soon afterwards he begins to show his intimate alliance with the feeling of the Renaissance, and the very early Renaissance. In this spirit is the architectural window for Dr. Richard Derby, where in a Renaissance architectural frame hangs a Venetian tapestry, embroidered with jewels and with a fringe of pendants, which would have pleased the ornamental taste of Brother Francis Colonna or the architects of Bergamo.

This was soon followed by some of the flower panels that are so characteristic of him. They are more or less inspired by the Japanese or Chinese, but always in a spirit of free translation, strengthened by direct inspiration from nature. Beautiful instances of these panels are to be seen in the houses of Laurence Alma Tadema, Esq., London; Henry Marquand, Esq., Newport, Rhode Island, &c. The one reproduced on page 65 is the *White Peony Window* in the house of Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt, in Fifth Avenue, New York. The flowers are here modelled and cast in moulds. They are of creamy white on a delicate blue; the borders are in many tones of white, relieved by pale sky-blue. Upon them hang garlands of rich flowers. The Marquand window, like that of Mr. Alma Tadema, has red and white peonies on a deep blue ground.

On page 67 we give a copy of one of the large hall windows of Mr. Frederick L. Ames's house in Boston. The windows vary in style, according to their position; this one has a deeply coloured centre of the richest materials, set in a light-toned architectural frame to give light to the hall. The subject, difficult to understand without the colour, is a careful study of an ancient Chinese motive, the Peacock and the Peony.

Among the illustrations scattered through the pages of this





*Angel Sealing the Servants of God in their Foreheads.  
Watson Memorial Window in Trinity Church, Buffalo.*





chapter, the semi-classical windows show favourite motives with the master and his small body of pupils (among whom may be especially mentioned his two sons, Mr. C. Grant La Farge, the well-known architect, Mr. Bancel La Farge, who is now associated with his father and Mr. John Humphreys Johnston).<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to see how these motives derived from architecture can be translated into glass. Sometimes Venice or Florence supplies a niche, a parapet, or a round arched opening of marbles ; sometimes Pompeii suggests a portico ; in every case there is great freedom of treatment and colour ; the fluted columns are green and white, red and deep violet ; mouldings may be blue ; string courses green or purple, ornament of the deepest and most brilliant colours. The panellings distantly suggesting marbles belong to this same realm of idealised material. All this rich imaginative architecture is sometimes used for its own sake, sometimes it is only the setting of a figure subject.

In the Ames Memorial at North Easton, Massachusetts, the architectural ornamentation is intimately connected with the figures. In the "Presentation" window, in the Church of the Ascension, New York, the architecture is only the setting of the subject.

Special interest attaches to the Watson Memorial window (represented by an illustration on p. 69), which was exhibited in Paris in 1889. It is a picture hung in the window-opening, with no help of architectural framework, depending on its balance of colour and composition for formal beauty and for architectonic fitness. Many of the artist's later windows are of this type, especially after his return from his travels in the South Seas, which noticeably influenced his style in general, and his treatment of the human figure. Among them I may mention the large circular window (twenty feet across) in Chicago, representing the Ascension, and the Nevins Memorial window in Methuen, Massachusetts, the subject of which is the Resurrection.

The mention of these last, of which we can only give one photograph, brings up to me the difficulty of suggesting the originals by any process in black and white.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Johnston is at present living and painting in Paris, and has apparently abandoned the Art of Glass. But Mr. La Farge desires that his name should be always associated with his own.

Photography, which already is quite inadequate in its representation of paintings of rich colour, or of colour and gold, is ever so much more incompetent before the extreme variety of values of rich glass. The difficulty is so well recognised that attempts are rarely made to copy windows by photography.

Drawings made for cartoons are used in their stead, if attainable, as they usually are for modern work. But Mr. La Farge's system, which has been explained above, is like that of the older artists in that it entails an absolute submission of the drawings and the cartoons to the material. There may be one partial drawing for a part of the colour, one for the values of the colour, one for the skies, one for the leads, and so on—none available for the public. It is only in that way that the varying necessities of each case can be met. In many cases the glass has been chosen and cut on the spot without a drawing or sketch.

In connection with the photographic reproductions here given, I will attempt some notice of the originals they reproduce.

The double window given on the opposite page is the well-known Battle window in the Memorial Hall of Harvard College, Cambridge.

Mr. La Farge has described in his notes to Mr. Bing the character of the workmanship of this, one of his earliest windows, and the first in which he introduced figure work. Notwithstanding there is no hesitancy in its design or execution ; it is a work of successful daring. The wealth of material suggested by the artist's own description, has a corresponding gorgeousness of effect, almost Eastern in splendour, but Western in the masses and strongly opposed contrasts of colour. This is further accentuated by the free classical character of the design. It is a pity that the deep sky, an important element of the window and of its design, disappears in the photograph.

The great Vanderbilt window, portions of which are reproduced, is on a large staircase, and consists of nine lights, running through three stories.

Our small illustration gives the three lower and most splendid windows. The following indications may help to some notion of the scheme of colouring. The draperies of the woman kneeling to the left, who represents "Hospitality," are of opalescent ruby. Her under tunic is yellow and white, the vine trellis dark against the deep blue sky, the grapes dark green and purple.



*Mosaic Glass Window: the Flag of Harvard College, known as the "Battle Window."  
Memorial Hall, Cambridge, Mass.*





The colour scheme of the central panel has the same Venetian harmony. The strings of jewels of varying colours add to the background's intensity of glow. The base is made of a first border of blue-green studded with jewels, red and yellow ; upon it a broader band of white opal, and again a band of irregular silvery crystal fragments, in which are scattered opal drops, edged by a delicate wavering line of green, which prevents all monotony or harshness of rectangularity. The final border is of brown and white. I dwell on these small details for once, because to me, personally, ornament can be as much of a revelation as a historic picture ; and the originality, grace, charm, and infinite suggestive-



*Three lower Windows on the Staircase of the House of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Esq.,  
New York.*

ness of Mr. La Farge's ornament have been a great source of delight to me.

The figure to the right, representing "Prosperity," is reproduced in our plate from the colour sketch. The glass is extremely rich, though the composition of colour is of remarkable simplicity and directness, its effect being largely due to the skilful adjustment of a very few primitive tones.

The three west windows of Trinity Church, Boston, are of a special type of design. They are long and narrow, some twenty-two feet high, and placed very high in the end wall of the nave.

The central window is almost filled by the colossal figure of Christ standing, His right hand raised in benediction, and holding a book in the



*Part of a Mosaic Glass Window.  
In the Residence of William H. Vanderbilt, Esq., New York.*

left hand. He is under a slender canopy, scarcely more than a mere frame of Byzantine architecture. Steps leading up serve to render the

figure more majestic : His robe is dark red and His mantle blue of many hues ; the background of uncut jewels is of an indescribable blue-green, which looks like a solidified air ; the canopy glows in gold and colours. So successful is the proportion of this colossal figure to the shape of the window and the space of the wall in which it is, that its size is forgotten ; it merely seems the point of interest in the west end.

Each of the side windows is divided throughout its length by a tall column, a motive which I have never seen applied or suggested elsewhere in glass, and which is entirely successful in connecting the actual architecture of the Church with the simulated architecture of the windows. These columns detach against the same blue-green ground of sky and air.

I should add that translucent stone has been used to accentuate the architectural features, and the glass is so rich in material that it is not possible to tell where the one ends and the other begins.

In his choice and treatment of theme, Mr. La Farge was guided partly by a wish to please the late Bishop Brooks, then rector of Trinity, by placing something simple and grave before his eyes when preaching. He wished also to increase the depth of the nave of the Church by a decoration of the windows, that should vary the wall surface at the west end and suggest spaces beyond. For this the tones of rich glass are especially fitted, as it is difficult to gauge their distance.

It so happened that I saw these windows on the very first day of my arrival in America, and I shall never forget the impression they made on me. I was fresh from a long stay in Italy, had but lately renewed my acquaintance with some of the French cathedrals, and was not easily satisfied with any modern attempts at religious art. But this took hold of me in a way that thrust all previous comparisons aside ; nothing, of the best, had ever moved me more deeply. Here was colour, permeated with a glow that I had not dreamed possible.

It did not seem possible ; this was not what I had been led to expect in America, nor did it seem to agree with what I saw in the houses of the city. I know now that the contrast presented by this my first day in America contains the explanation of much that troubles foreigners. The method invented by Mr. La Farge has been coarsely exploited by others. Only in the hands of a true artist does its precious quality, such a revelation to us foreigners, remain unhurt.



## CHAPTER V

### TRAVELS, JOURNALS, LECTURES

As I have said already, the arts of Japan had attracted Mr. La Farge at a time when they had a merely curious interest for the world at large. His first published work is the chapter on Japanese art, written for Mr. Raphael Pumpelly's *Across America and Asia*. I have quoted from this essay in my chapter on Mr. La Farge's landscape, and I give one or two more passages here to show the style of the writer, and his appreciation of the importance of Japanese art at a time when its products were promiscuously exported as curiosities and when the difficulty of travel made any thorough knowledge of its monuments unattainable.

“ . . . Most evident in Japanese art is the use of the marvellous decoration, the very crown of the power over colour, always an heirloom of the East, and a separate gift from ours. To Eastern directness, fulness, and splendour, the Japanese add a sobriety, a simplicity, a love of subdued harmonies, and imperceptible gradations, and what may be called an intellectual refinement akin to something in the Western mind. If we wish, their works can be for us a store-house as ample and as valuable in its way as the treasures of form left to us by the Greeks. For the Japanese, no combinations of colours have been improbable, and their solutions of such as are set aside by Western convention recall the very arrangements of nature.

“Great beauty of colour is apt to obscure the structure upon which it rests, and excellence of design not seldom goes unrecognised in the works of the great colourists. Little as this is felt in the harmonious synthesis of Japanese decoration, Japanese drawing and wood-cuts in black and white allow us to gauge their abstract power of design, and their knowledge of drawing. Stripped of the other beauties of colour



and texture so peculiar to their precious work, these drawings give us in the simplest way their control of composition, that power in art which affects the imagination by the mere adjustment of lines and masses. Their work can be compared to the best in this, the simplest means of expression in art, for in this all its forms and periods are united, and the tattooing of the savage is connected with the designs of Michael Angelo. In fact, it is the nearest expression of the will of the artist, which is the very foundation of art.

“In ornamental design Japanese composition has developed a principle which separates it, technically, from other schools of decoration; it will have been noticed by all who have observed Japanese ornamental work. It might be called a principle of irregularity, or apparent chance arrangement—a balancing of equal gravities, not of equal surfaces. A Western designer, in ornamenting a given surface, would look for some fixed points from which to start, and would mark the places where his mind had rested by exact and symmetrical divisions. These would be supposed by a Japanese, and his design would float over them, while they, though invisible, would be felt beneath. Thus a few ornaments—a bird, a flower—on one side of this page would be made by an almost intellectual influence to balance the large unadorned space remaining.

“And so, by a principle familiar to painters, an appeal is made to the higher ideas of design, to the desire of concealing art beneath a look of nature. It has the advantage of allowing any division and extension and super-imposition of other and contradictory designs. And, by another kinship with the higher forms of art, the Japanese look to more symmetrical arrangements for their graver effects and religious symbolisms. To carry out this subtle conciliation of symmetry and chance, this constant reference to the order of nature, has required, of course, an incessant watching of all its moods and all its details. . . .

“I have no space to consider whether, if the Japanese have an ideal, it can be contained, as with the Greeks, in the dream of a perfect beauty. The sufficient ideal of realism is character. Nor, any more than in Pagan antiquity, need we expect to find in Japanese art that deeper individual personality—the glory of our greatest art—which may perhaps be connected (however illogically it has been proved) with the education of the Western world by Christianity. The effort to bring

to the surface the subtlest, deepest, and most complex feelings of the mind, which is the soul of the works of Leonardo, of Michael Angelo, of Rembrandt, has had apparently no exemplar outside of modern and Christian Europe. . . ."

It was not until 1886 that the artist realised his wish to see the sights and study the people of Japan with his own eyes. He spent a summer there with his friend, Mr. Henry Adams, the historian, writing home from time to time the delightful letters that have since (in the volumes for 1890, 1891, 1893) appeared in the *Century Magazine*. Travellers assure me that they have "the true flavour of Japan." Nothing about Japan that I have read has seemed to me to have such depth and sympathy. In their keen perceptions they are pre-eminently an artist's letters; in their wide and varied speculations, a subtle thinker's. Full of touches that bring things seen before us with peculiar vividness, rich in passages that seize the essential point in discussions of art, Eastern and Western, questions of history, philosophy, national characteristics, they have the rare directness and penetrative insight of the men whose birthright is to see. Other passages, again, are chiefly remarkable for their delightful avoidance of the point at issue, for the charmingly dreamy way in which the writer follows side tracks and lets his mind ride "the stray fancies that float past," sometimes leading him into realms of the brightest spiritual beauty, as in the inimitable letter called "Tao, or The Way."

Several of the sketches brought back from Japan were exhibited in Paris in a special exhibition within the Salon du Champ de Mars in 1895. These clear and sparkling water-colours are different from the Pre-Raphaelite studies which I have mentioned in preceding chapters, and yet like them they seek the faithful rendering of facts, of light and atmosphere, of colour and structure, without any thought of looking for motives, or even seeing pictures. Perhaps this is why they have such an exotic charm.

This desire to chronicle simply, faithfully, with the keen insight and marvellous technique at his command, is the key-note of all the sketches brought home from Mr. La Farge's later wanderings in the South Seas. It was "the thing itself," as he says in *Tao*, that appealed to him, not the opportunity for making pictures. The artist here

is one with the deeply curious student ; but only an artist could have seen and given things as he has done.

The impression which I have tried to analyse has been felt by the eminent French critic, M. Paul Bourget. He describes these studies of the South Seas in some pages of his *Outre-Mer*, which I shall quote at length :—

“ Nowhere have I felt more keenly the influence of travel upon American intellectuality than in New York, and in the studio of that admirable painter, too little known to us, notwithstanding his French name, John La Farge. The man himself, who is no longer young, whose subtle face with a skin whitened, and as if dried by inner ardour, with eyes mobile and yet held within lids both drawn and stretched, gives the impression of a nervous activity unappeased by any effort, unsatisfied through any experience, and seeking, and seeking again. He has invented new processes for stained glass. He has practised both decoration and illustration, painting in oil, and encaustic, has executed large altar-pieces, such as his grand and refined Ascension in the Episcopal Church, as well as delicate pastelles. Some months ago he was wandering among the islands of the Pacific—Samoa, Tahiti, the Fiji Islands.

“ ‘ We wished to go very far,’ he said. ‘ Japan is too near. There is always the telegraph. The Pacific gives you at least two months free from news.’

“ This is the cry of the artist, tired of conventional life, tired of the railroad, the telephone, or all that makes business easy and breaks up time, hungry for new sensations, and especially in love with his art, and violently resolved to live for his thought alone during days and days. And while the snowy January afternoon iced the city, these little islands, lost upon the map, took life, and were lit and became green for me, through the pictures of this refined painter, whose least words betray the seeker of a kind like Fromentin, the visionary, who thinks out his sensations,—a rare—a very rare power. . . . Here are branches over-green edging a sea overblue, branches, the web of whose leaves seems full of water, and which tell the perpetual dampness of the air about them. Banana trees lift their straight trunks, from which drop the long, subtle blades of their leaves. The cocoa-trees toss their palms

in the wind of the Pacific, that blows without ceasing—a wind which passes, like the immense wave of that immense ocean, from one pole to the other. The burao, a great tree with knotty trunk, spreads its wide leafage, similar to that of our fig-trees. Everywhere are flowers, and the flat full-blown corollas of the strange hibiscus. In this natural stage-decoration appear very low huts with thatch and open sides along which fall the supple mats. Men and women pass between these trees, and the edges of that sea, some dancing, crowned with flowers ; others all covered with leafage, crawling to some murder ; others bearing on their shoulders light canoes, others in these canoes going out to fish. And all about them is a landscape cared for, cleaned, almost adorned : ‘the savage,’ says the painter profoundly, ‘is the old-fashioned gentleman, the man of traditions, who does everything according to rule, and who refuses to change anything of his habits.’ And showing me a girl sliding down a waterfall of terrible appearance : ‘She is not afraid,’ he adds. ‘Because there is not a fold of the soil that she does not know, not a pebble which has not been for centuries in the same place, out of the water, and under the water. Over there, when you hurt your foot you say to yourself, my grandfather had warned me that there was a stone in the path.’ . . . .

“. . . . Among all others the bathing scenes are charming to look at. Wide rivers run within the woods. Fair women’s bodies are plunged with noble antique immodesty in this water wherein the blue of heaven descends. Children play in the surf of the ocean. The wave breaks against the reef, and in the places where it drags over coral bottoms, its green shade becomes so pure and so intense as to be clothed in the colouring of precious stones. At other moments, with the setting sun, it is all rosy. The brown and lithe nudity of the savage is detached with the delicacies of antique bronze against this ocean of divine hue. One feels the soft and caressing atmosphere in which the human animal is happy with an almost vegetable felicity ; or in which like a plant it languishes. Seated around a fire that lights them fantastically, the women of Tahiti draped in long dresses of light stuffs, with straw hats on their little heads, seem to play at winter, while other groups figure scenes of biblical or Hellenic grandeur—an old man, blind and naked, is led by a child ; a brown youth gallops a white horse on the shore of the sea ; dances,



bacchanals, I had almost said, interlace, and the heavy leaves of the garlands worn by the wild dancers recall the feasts in the ravines of the Taygetus, sung of by the poet :

“ . . . . Et virginibus bacchata Lacaenis  
Taygeta . . . .

“ The joy of the painter as he shows these studies is delightful to see.



*Blind Man and his Daughter at Vaiala, Samoa.  
From a Water-colour Drawing.*

His eyes warm under the caresses of this remembered light, his mind is married again to this primitive life, with the delight of renewed youth, and of initiation.”

Mr. Bourget’s analysis is confirmed by Mr. La Farge’s own description of the attitude of the painter. I quote from notes prefixed to one of his South Sea journals, to which in a moment I shall refer.

“You must remember that I am a painter, and that we painters are in a certain way like children ; we delight in anything seen ; and all things that we notice in any way are accompanied by a sort of picture. No matter what the moment may be—it may be one of pleasure, it may be one of danger, it may be one of extreme anxiety or mental tension—it is usually pictured in the mind, even when the mind is occupied otherwise. I make this statement because my notebook will read differently to you on that account ; and things will be described from outside and as pictures, and often referring more to pictures and drawings and art, even if I am moralising or explaining. And that you must forgive ; and even perhaps it may prove to have some advantage ; because it may urge you to use your imagination, and try to see in your mind the things described in the manner in which I have set them forth. Besides, the fact that I speak of the colour of this thing or that, may help to give you a notion of the kind of day it was : hence of the weather : hence of the climate. And if I speak of the people I saw and describe their gestures, you can make a picture to yourself explaining why they were beautiful ; and I am saved from telling you that they were beautiful or otherwise. Because, as you know, tastes differ extremely ; and we don't think of beauty in the same way when we speak of a cow or of a tiger, of brown men like my islanders, or of white men like yourselves.”

It has been my privilege to consult the sketchbooks, notebooks, and journals that belong to the year of travel during which were made the sketches and paintings of the South Seas, that Mr. La Farge has shown both in the United States and in Paris. We reproduce from the sketchbooks some few drawings here and there. From the great mass of the journals I prefer to quote some notes written in Samoa, because especially they were made at the moment of the artist's first acquaintance with his first South Sea Island, to which he was taken by accident, “so that he happened to fall right into the ordinary strange way of life, for a few hours, without any preface, as if he had dropped through the world.”

Tutuila, a little island of the Samoan group, was the place to which the travellers' little cutter was taken by unexpected wind and calm. Here they were initiated into the ways of savage life in “a far-away place that kept up old fashions.” The journals and the sketchbooks describe how they were taken to the guest house, and properly received



*Siva Dance at Night, Samoa. From a Water-colour Drawing.*





by the Taupo or official Virgin of the village, hurrying to meet her unexpected guests according to the rules of time-honoured etiquette. Kava, the ceremonial drink, was made and offered in the true ceremonial way in cadences of regulated gestures, by graceful bronze-brown maidens, wreathed and draped in fruit and leaves. They watched the old women beat out the bark cloth. Between the showers they walked across the village green "edged by huts and trees, the palms thickening in the distance and hiding the sudden and clear slope of the mountain right against us." "From the intricate tangle of green we saw the amethyst sea, and the white line of sounding surf, cutting through the sloping pillars of the cocoa-nuts that made a mall along the shore ; and over on



*Siva Dance at Vailala, Samoa. From a Water-colour Drawing.*

the other side of the narrow harbour, the great high green wall of the mountain, warm in the sun ; its fringe of cocoa-nut groves and the few huts hidden within it, softened below by the haze blown up from the breakers. All made a picture not too large to be taken in at a glance ; the reality of the pictures of savage lands in our school books filled in with infinite detail."

"From dark interior of huts came gentle greetings of 'Alofa' (hail !). . . . Young men went by, with wreaths on their heads, undraped to the waist, like the statues of the gods of the family of Jove ; their wide shoulders, and strong smooth arms, and long back-muscles or great pectorals shining like red bronze. All this strength was soft ; the muscles of the younger men softened and passed into one another as in

the modelling of a Greek statue. As with the girls we had just left, no rudeness of hair marred the ruddy surfaces, recalling all the more the ideal of statues. Occasionally the hair, reddened or whitened, and the drapery of the native dark cloth, *siapu*, of a brown ochre colour, not unlike the flesh, recalled still more the look of a Greek clay image, with its colour and gilding broken by time. And never in any case was there a bit of colour that might be called barbaric; the patterns might be European, but no one could have chosen them better, for use with great surfaces of flesh. If all this does not tell you that there was no naked-



*Siva in the Seated Dance, Samoa.*

ness,—that we only had the *nude* before us,—I shall not have given you these details properly. Evidently all was according to order and custom; the proportion of covering, the manner of catching the drapery and the arrangement of folds according to some meaning, well defined by ancient usage.”

According to custom pretty maidens entertained the charmed travellers with dances: of which the following is an immediate record: “A light was brought and set down upon the matting. Uakea slipped out between the hanging screens and the pillar behind me,—and slipped back again, rid of her upper garment, with a sort of *poncho*, or strip of



SAMOAN GIRLS DANCING THE SEATED DANCE

*from a Water Colour Drawing in the possession of Dr. W. S. Bigelow, Boston*





cloth with opening for head, patterned in lozenges of black, white, and red, that hung down her back and chest, leaving arms and shoulders bare, and the sides of her body, so that as she bent, the soft line that joins the breast to the under arm, showed under the heavy folds. Then, in came our missing pet, Sivá, with Tuvále and two others, into the penumbra of the lamp. They were naked to the waist; over their tucked-up drapery hung brilliant leaf-strips of light green, streaked with red; a few leaves girdled the ankle; around Sivá's neck, over her beautiful bosom, hung a long narrow garland of leaves, and on the others garlands of red fruit or long rows of beads interlaced; every head was wreathed with green and red leaves, and all and everything, leaves, brown flesh, and tresses glistened with perfumed oil. From the small focus of the lamp, the light struck on the surface of the leaves as upon some delicate fairy tinsel, and upon the forms of the girls as if upon a red bronze waxed. But no bronze has ever been movable, and the perpetual ripple of light over every fold, muscle, and dimple, was the most complete theatrical lighting I have ever seen. Even in the dark, streaks of light lit up the forms and revealed every delicacy of motion.

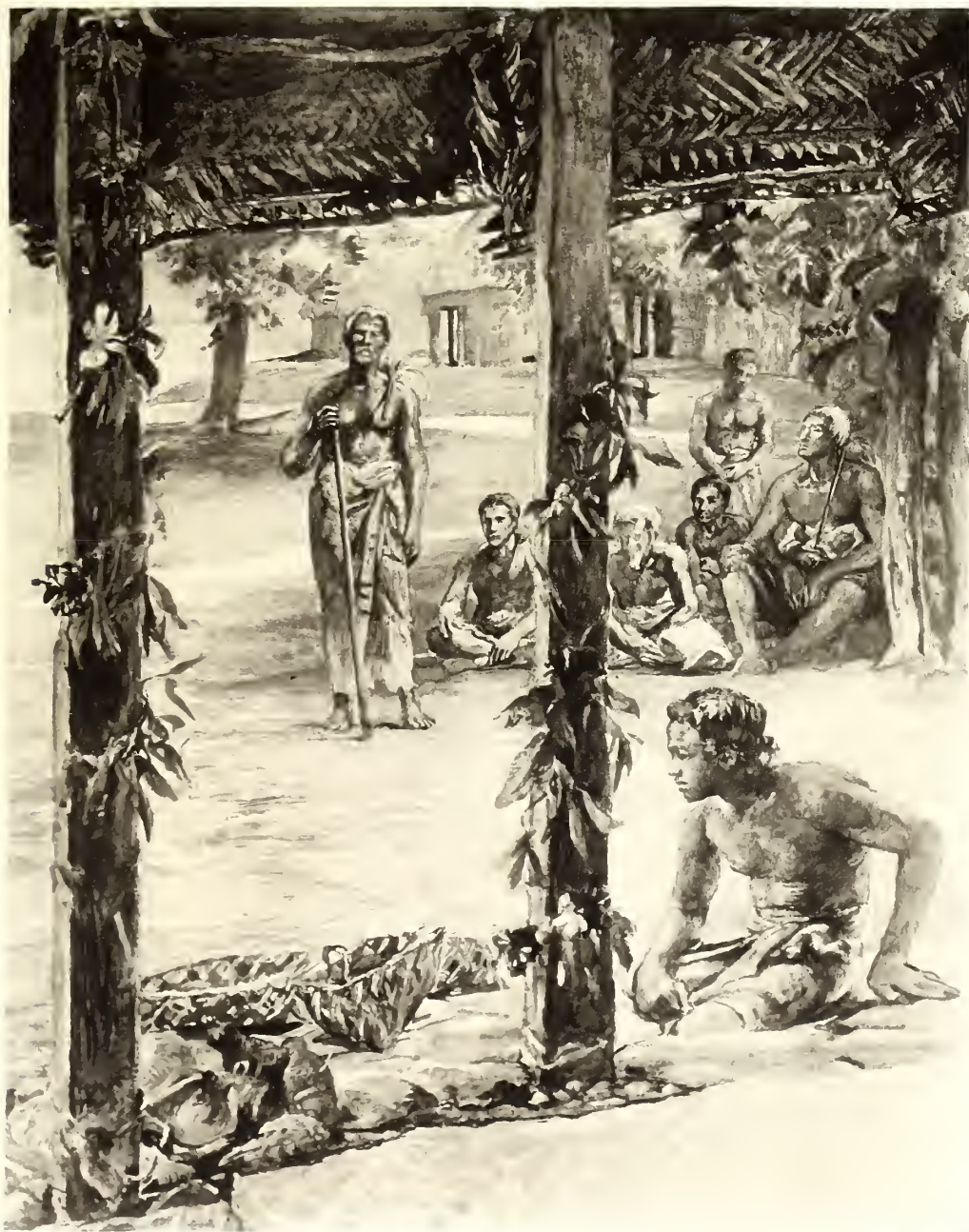
"So those lovers of form, the Greeks, must have looked, anointed and crowned with garlands, and the so-called dance that we saw might not have been misplaced far back in some classical antiquity. The girls sat in a row before us, grave and collected, their beautiful legs curled upon the lap as in East Indian sculptures; and Sivá began a curious chant. As all sang with her together, they moved their arms in various ways to the cadence and in explanation of the song; and with the arms, now the waist and shoulders, now the entire body even to the feet, rising apparently upon the thighs to the time of music. Indeed Sivá spoke with her whole tremulous body, undulating to the fingers, all in a rhythm, as the sea runs up and down on the beach, and is never at rest, but seems to obey one general line of curve. So she, and the others, turned to one side and the other, and stretched out their arms, or crossed them, and passed them under the hollow of the arms, and pressed each other's shoulders and lifted fingers in some sort of tale, and made gestures evident of meaning, or obscure, and swayed and turned; and, most beautiful of all, stretched out long arms upon the mats, as if swimming upon their sides, while all the time the slender waist swayed and the legs and thighs followed the rhythm through their muscles, without being displaced.

"I cannot describe it any better : of what use is it to say that it was beautiful and extraordinary, and that no motion of a Western dancer but would seem stiff beside such an ownership of the body. It must have been beautiful merely as motion, for the fourth woman was old and not beautiful, but she melted into the others, so that one only saw, as it were, the lovely form of Sivá repeated by poorer reflections of her motion in lesser light. . . . I wonder that no one had told me of a rustic Greece still alive somewhere, to be looked at. So that the old Italian statues and paintings were no conventionality, and that the whaler, the missionary, and the beach-comber were witnesses of things that they did not see because they had not read. And if one reads does he care to-day? Had I only known, years ago!—even at this date, when it is too late, the memory of all that beauty that we call Greece, the one beauty which is to outlast all that is alive, comes over me like a wave of mist, softening and putting far away into fairyland all that I have been looking at."

These words were written next morning on board of the little boat to "the long sway and cadence of the distant surf, like to the movement of ancient verse,—the music of the *Odyssey*."

"If through it all you can gather my impression, can see something of the old beauty, always known, in these new pictures, you will understand why the Greek Homer is in my mind—all Greece, the poetry of form and colour that comes from her. The Samoan youngster who rose shining from the sea to meet us, all brown and red, with a red hibiscus blossom fastened in his hair by a grass knot as beautiful as any carved ornament, was Tintoretto's Bacchus making offering to Ariadne. . . . And there will soon come a day when, even for those who care, all this will be no more ; when nowhere on earth or sea will there be any living proof that Greek art is not the mere invention of the poet—the refuge of the artist in his disdain of the ugly in life. What I have just seen is already to me almost a dream."

This exquisite "dream" is the keynote of one side of the Samoan journals. Reading them is like a long vision of a heroic age, still surviving in dances and ceremonies, poetry of gesture and rounded beauty of form. Mr. La Farge is careful to say "that poetry is not in them, but of them." "The whole body has had an external meaning, has been used as ours is no longer, to express a feeling or to maintain a reserve



*Official Presentation of Gifts of Food, Samoa.*

*W. Bell 1883*





which we only look for in a face." "I am lingering here, as I see for the first time, and probably for the last, a rustic and a Boeotian antiquity, and if I like to paint subjects of the 'nude' and 'drapery,' I shall know how they look in reality."

Mr. La Farge's record is doubly valuable : not only does he possess the sympathetic insight and the power of observation of the painter ; he has also the wide reading, tenacious memory, and careful curiosity of the student : while this visionary and mystic is noted for his respect for facts and painstaking accuracy in details.

The sketches and the journals explain what happens to the travellers. Often the record is set down at the same time both in line or colour and in words. The rhythm of the written phrases follows the rhythm of the movement whose attitudes are sketched also by the pencil or the brush.

Thus we can follow the travellers in boats of Polynesian chiefs on trips of mingled etiquette and pleasure : we see the dances sometimes wild, sometimes languorous, always beautifully cadenced. Of these some are dramatic, even Aristophanic in character, some lyric or descriptive ; while others are improvisations upon given themes : what might be called, it seems, complimentary odes to distinguished guests, or ballads about some young chief, often one of the performers.

As in the drawing reproduced in our plate<sup>1</sup> the travellers are duly

<sup>1</sup> "This is not a scene from an opera, nor a study for a classical fresco like those of M. Puvis de Chavannes. It is what we saw at a little place called Faleu in the little island of Manono, where we were last month for two days, and it was still more like a scene from an opera and much more classical. The drawing represents a tulafale, or village orator, addressing us in set speech, according to rules, on the occasion of the presentation of gifts of food. Two other tulafales are also present, one from the same village and another from our own. This one is also a chief and is the sitting giant, while the speechmaker is not a large man. You will recognise the tulafales by their fly-brushes, placed on their shoulders. We are looking at them through the posts or pillars of the elliptical house, the guest-house in which we were sitting. These posts are decorated with flowers in our honour according to custom. There are baskets of food, cocoanuts, and taro-roots, thrown on the stones outside the house, which in this case is placed on an ascent. The young man in the foreground sitting on the slope of stones, is one of our crew, who in a moment will rise, count aloud the presents, stating who gave them, &c. The presents were few, the place a poor little village, and the occasion a small one.

"But the classical impression was all the greater, and nothing could exaggerate the look of the set scene of a play. Even the little canoe, under the big tree looked like the real boats put on the stage to increase the illusion."

harangued by the tulafales, hereditary orators : military receptions and war dances are given in their honour. The bodyguard of murderers of the King Malietoa repeat their evolutions before them. But here I shall quote from the journal :

“ Right in the middle of the green before us, treading the path between the Princess and her girls, crouching to the ground, sprawling or running, bending low, came three men, all blackened, with green wreaths of leaves around their heads and a short tail of white Tappa hanging out of their girdles. These were the King’s ‘murderers,’ the Aitutagata, relics of a bygone time, when savage chiefs, like European, used licensed crime to rid themselves of enemies—or friends—against whom they could not wage open war. These whom we saw were only on parade, but the ancestors of these official murderers by heredity had been actively employed. At the whispered word of the chief they tracked the destined victim, risking their lives in the attack, and plunged into him their peculiar weapon, the Foto, the barb of the sting ray, which, breaking in the wound, and poisonous withal, meant inevitable death.”

And this, an account of one of the war dances :

“ The sound of the guns filled the air. Slowly now, moving step by step, the mass of people behind the trees came so that they could be seen. In front of the men with a chorus of girls preceding her, a girl with black shaggy waist garment like thin fur, with long red necklaces of beads, flowers in her hair, danced slowly to a tune, crossing and uncrossing her feet, swinging with both hands a small club, as a drum-major might move his stick. Slowly she advanced, escorted by two men, from whose heads stood out a mass of yellow hair like the cap of a military officer, supported by circles of shells around the head. They also kept time to the music, but did not repeat the girl’s monotonous step which made the central point of interest to which the eye always returned. This girl was the Taupo, the virgin of the village, dancing and marching in her official place at the head of the warriors. When she had moved slowly a few yards, one could see that in the crowd there were other girls representing other villages, who also repeated these movements, while some of the men danced and others stepped slowly with crossed arms holding clubs or muskets.”

The travellers passed a year together among these isles of summer and free air, under exceptional circumstances and with advantages not easily repeated. They had most of the privileges that name and influence



*Atutagata, the Hereditary Assassin of King Maletoa, Sapapali, Savaii, Samoa, Oct. 1890.  
From a Water-colour Drawing in the possession of Henry L. Higginson, Esq., Boston.*





can bring. The artist's companion, Mr. Henry Adams, the historian and the scholar, is the grandson and great-grandson of Presidents of the United States, and therefore to the islanders a representative of all his country's past and of a royal house. Warships have carried the name for a century to all the isles of the ocean. Hence, perhaps, among all other reasons, a certain sympathy of understood position from the chiefs, the last defenders and bulwarks of an antique aristocratic past, and less reticence in their explanations. The tone of the journals thus naturally becomes more comprehensive and more philosophical with the soundings of the savage mind and the analysis of early civilisation. Any extracts would suffer in being separated from their context. I shall merely quote a passage which refers to the famous personality of King Mataafa.

"Mataafa sometimes calls at this hour, sometimes a little earlier, on his return from church, if it be a holy day—for Mataafa is very strict in religious duty. But usually he has chosen the afternoon. He speaks no English and we have varying interpreters; but still, owing in part to his kindness and courtesy, we have learned a great deal from him. He is not so easily questioned as an inferior might be. When Tofae's great daughter is called in hurriedly to help out, because we have not had sufficient warning—Tofae's daughter, who fears no man, whose neck carries her head as a column does a capital—she interprets with extreme respect and reticence, as it were by your leave, bending her head, looking only sidewise at the great chief, holding her breath when she speaks to him and almost whispering. Every phrase is prefaced with 'The King says,' all of which gives us the measure of proper respect, but does not hasten the conversation.

"Mataafa is not interested in facts as mere curiosities. I doubt if he would approve of my interest in most things if he could guess it. Information with regard to the world abroad he cares for only as it affects Samoa, that is to say, in conversation with us. He would like to know that we have some messages of advantage to his country. It has taken a long time to make him sympathise with our questionings about Samoan ways and manners, and their origins, which involve, of course, history and social law. And yet if he could appreciate it, in that way we get at an understanding of what he is and of the difficulties that beset him.

"The constant interference, involuntary very often, very often most

kindly meant, of the missionary or the clergyman, has diminished this influence of the chief—an unwritten, uncoded power, properly an influence, something that when once gone has to be born again. And the brown clergyman, continuing the authority of the white one, has something further less pure, a feeling of ambition, a desire to assert himself against former superiors ; and he is perhaps still more a dissolvent of the body politic into which he was born.

“I see no picture about me more interesting than the moral one of my next neighbour, the great Mataafa. To see the devout Christian, the man who has tried to put aside the small things that tie us down, struggle with the antique prejudices—necessary ones—of a Polynesian nobleman, is a touching spectacle. When a young missionary rides up to his door while all others gently come up to it, and those who pass move far away, out of respect, and then when the confident youth, full of his station as a religious teacher, speaks to the great chief from his saddle, Mataafa’s face is a study. Over the sensitive countenance, which looks partly like that of a warrior, partly like that of a bishop or church guardian, comes a wave of surprise and disgust, promptly repelled, as the higher view of forgiveness and respect for holy office comes to his relief.

“But Mataafa is not only a chief of chiefs, he is a gentleman among gentlemen. My companion, difficult to please, says, ‘La Farge, at last we have met a gentleman.’

“His is a sad fate : to have done all for Samoa ; to have beaten the Germans and wearied them out ; to have been elected king, by almost unanimous consent, including that of the present king, who wished him to reign ; then to be abandoned by us ; and to feel his great intellectual superiority and yet to be idle and useless when things are going wrong. And more than all, however supported by the general feeling to-day, if he moves to establish his claims, the three foreign nations who decide Samoa’s future, not for her good, but for their comfort or advantage, will certainly have to combine and crush him.

“He is a hero of tragedy, a reminder of the Middle Ages, when a man could live a religious life and a political one.

“And his adversaries among the natives are among our friends, and we like them also, though there is none to admire like Mataafa.”

The journals from Tahiti at once strike a different key. The Greek

note of classical nudity, or rhythm in motion, is gone from the journals as it has gone from the sketches; the Samoan sketches are rather figure subjects; the Tahitian sketches, rather landscapes. In Tahiti we are in another world. The landscape is of dream-like loveliness. "The beach. . . is as beautiful as if composed for Claude Lorraine; great trees stand up within a few feet of the tideless sea. Where the shallows run in at times, canoes and outriggers are pulled up. People sit near the water's edge, on the grass. Outside of all the shade, we see the island of Moorea further out than the far line of the reef, no longer blue, but glowing like a rose in the beginning of the twilight. . . . The end of our road brings us along the sea, but far up, so that we look down over spaces of palm and indentations of small bays fringed with foam, all in the shade below us. On the sea is outlined always the island of Moorea. Landward on Tahiti rise the great mountain, the *Aorai*, the edge apparently of a great central crater, and a fantastic serrated peak called the 'Diadem,' also an edge of the great chasm. On the other side great ridges run from the sea to the central heights, recalling the vast slopes of Hawaii. But here all is green; even the eight thousand feet of the *Aorai*, which look blue and violet, melt into the green around us, so as to show that the same verdure passes unbroken, wherever there is a foothold, from the sea to the highest tops. This haze of green, so delicate as to be nameable only by other colours, gives a look of sweetness to these high places, and makes them repeat, in tones of light, against the blue of the sky, chords of colour similar to those of the trees and the grass against the blue and violet of the sea. . . . But the simplicity, joyous, unconcerned, of Samoa is missing. . . . In Samoa we struck the keynote—or at least what remains of the antique Polynesian civilisation. In Tahiti they are a century almost in advance, or rather in change of the older ways. Here they wear hats, the girls especially, and the long gowns—the men wear the loin cloth and commonly a shirt; though sometimes you see the bare body, usually fine and strong—their colour is paler or more neutral than the ruddy tone of the Samoan flesh. And their faces are finer, but sadder and yet not nobler. Indeed, though I do not feel it here so much, in this charming place, where our host and his sister and his mother, the old chiefess, are kindly entertaining us, there is a general impression of

sadness and pensiveness which affects even the very landscape. . . . The blues and violets and greens fall into chords that are rarely gay, even though the landscape forms are those that we might call *riant*, if we were talking French. The running of the many little rivers to the sea, and the meeting of the waters with the incoming tide, the sight of the breakers on the reef, or their splashing on the shore behind a screen of foliage of beautiful patterns, the blue haze, or the darkness of the mountains and the greyness of reflected light, which makes them look like velvet—all these combinations are lovely and slightly mournful.” The very chaunts which in Samoa seemed joyous, here sounded sad. “Tati’s mother, the old chiefess, Ariitamai, or Hinarii, repeated legends and stories suggested by the songs : war cries of ancestors ; praises of the beauties who unveiled themselves at the bath. All now sung by these quiet, sad people in straw hats, gowns, and scarves, with an occasional umbrella.” . . .

I have mentioned the chiefess Ariitamai. “This great lady, the greatest in all the Pacific, is the last link of the old and new : with her will go traditions, stories, and habits of indefinite antiquity, of the earliest life of man. . . . We are asking her to tell something of them while we are here. But it would take months to get even a part : some of it will be saved ; the genealogies which prove title to names and successions and hence to lands. All this has been secret, for with the mixing of families, and no written records until to-day, the knowledge of one’s ancestry was the proof of descent and ownership. . . . We who listen and she who speaks represent, as we sit about her on the mats, vast differences of training and of race ; extreme varieties of habits of mind ; and I am all the more impressed when I realise the vast spaces of the physical and the intellectual world that are compressed into this little space. When the delicate voice of the younger princess, her daughter, whispers, ‘that too is like Lohengrin’ ; or her other daughter, the Queen, translates into French, because the exact meaning is not so precisely represented in English, I feel that we have really come to the end of the ancient world.” The poetic attachment of the travellers to this fairyland became more intimate ; the great chiefess adopted them into her own family,<sup>1</sup> her

<sup>1</sup> Two Europeans have shared to some extent this singular and poetic privilege : the late Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, in so far as he was adopted into the outer branch of the Teva, and Prince Oscar of Sweden.



ancestors became theirs, the family legends theirs by inheritance. They thus even may claim descent from the mythical ancestor, the God-Shark or man-fish, who began the race : they received ancient titles and names of founders of the family.

The long dream of holiday came to an end. "We passed the fantastic peaks and crags of Moorea, wrapped above in the scud of the trade-winds blowing in our favour. In a gentle sadness the two islands faded into the dark ; the end of the charm we had been under—too exquisite ever to be repeated."

The journals from Hawaii and Fiji, Java and Ceylon must be left unquoted. In 1891 Mr. La Farge returned to Europe.

In the autumn of 1892 he undertook the unwonted task of teaching. In connection with a course of instruction in Colour and Composition given to students at the Metropolitan Museum of New York, he gave six public lectures on Painting.<sup>1</sup> Touching their scope, he says (Lecture V.) :

"The museum, as you know, is a modern institution. It is admirable in one sense ; in another, what it replaces was better for the life of art than what it gives to-day. The change was inevitable and in certain ways we shall have to accept it for the indefinite future. With time we shall readjust ourselves, we shall develop better the methods imposed upon us ; it may be that we shall make still stronger what remains we have of the methods of instruction that belong to the past. With the division, then, established in the methods of record, the academy teaching certain things and the museum all things ; the one analytically and in sequence, the other as life teaches, in masses of fact, we come to feel that to bring back the ancient synthesis, the two divisions forced upon us by modern changes must be brought together. . . . What we need to think of to-day, and what, in a certain way, I am here to show you, is that the museum knows more than the academy."

With this statement of the value of the museum, compare the following remarks on personality :

"In such a place, then, as the museum, we may well look with awe

<sup>1</sup> *Considerations on Painting.* (Macmillan and Co., New York, 1895.)

at the long succession of efforts made by our ancestors in art, those whom we know and those whom we do not know, but from whom we inherit in common. It is to study some of these efforts, among which may be some that will avail you, that we have come together. We are not anxious at present to assign them any exact date or sequence, except as the one may strictly derive from the other. For our purposes we may often be anxious, on the contrary, to forget their date and the place where they were made; because what is most interesting to us in the line of personal inquiry is, that these artists of all kinds and degrees were men like ourselves and had to work with means not dissimilar to ours. . . . You will see again what I have been telling you, last week and to-day, that the *man* is the main question, and that there can be no absolute view of nature. I do not know how often you may be talked to about the theories of art, and how much you care for the same at the present moment, but at some moment or other you will have brought before you that most important conflict of realism and its opposite. I don't say idealism, because I don't so distinctly know what is meant by it, while realism has been in the market now for quite a time, and has served as a beautiful playground for various intellects.

"What I want you to notice is that, though abstractly there must be such a thing—I should be the last to gainsay it—yet, in these realities with which we are concerned, realism is a very evasive distinction. If the experiments that I spoke of bring out the result that you have seen, there is for you practically no such thing as realism.

"You need not, therefore, be afraid of the word; you need not be afraid of indulging the illusion that you are rendering the real reality of the things that you look at—that you are copying, that you are transcribing. If you ever know how to paint somewhat well, and pass beyond the position of the student who has not yet learned to use his hands as an expression of the memories of his brain, you will always give to nature, that is to say, what is outside of you, the character of the lens through which you see it—which is yourself." (Lecture II.)

Yet Mr. La Farge is a firm believer in the inviolability of tradition in art, in the ephemeral character of all "art movements" that have not

grown in the soil of tradition—tradition, not convention. To quote once more from the lectures :

“And so, by merging oneself into the methods and the reasons for the methods of the Masters, one would feel less inclined to have one’s own way. And we students, we who study together, may see that originality does not consist in looking like no one else, but merely in causing to pass into our own work some personal view of the world and of life. Nor does it matter that these things done are the work of men of whom we speak as no longer living. They are always the work of the majority of men : for the dead outnumber the living. And with them we are as close to human nature as we are to the human nature that moves for the brief moment around us.” (Lecture I.)

Mr. La Farge is fortunate in having a literary style which is as personal as his talent in the arts more especially his own ; it has allowed him to touch in words upon regions of thought that seem to evade words. As he says for himself (Lecture III.) :

“Should you hesitate a moment and believe—or rather imagine—that the reasons that I give are subtle, are fine drawn, pause a moment, and ask yourselves, on the contrary, whether they are not gross and heavy attempts at handling with words a thing so subtle even as the representation of anything by a line. If, in fact, I can express these ideas adequately in the words of ordinary language, I must have left a great deal unexplained. Art begins where language ceases, and the impressions that we receive, and the manners through which we render them, are in themselves so subtle that no one has yet been able to analyse more than a certain exterior of the mechanism of sensation and of representation.”

In his analysis of the art of Mr. La Farge, M. Bourget has recognised the subtle connection of Eastern calm with the fierce activity of America, which is now, as it were, a great crucible. In it the problems of art, as of race, are being tried. There is much in Mr. La Farge’s genius which could not belong to one of purely Anglo-Saxon blood ; much also that could not have been developed in the more academic atmosphere of

European culture. One of the distinguishing qualities of a man of his inflexible individuality is that while he is often the founder of a school, he can never belong to one, and must of necessity be solitary. Such enforced solitude, as the French writer says, makes it difficult to foresee whether there will ever be an American art, but there are certainly already great artists in America.

And that, after all, is enough for the glory of a nation.



## INDEX

- ADAMS, Mr. Henry, 80, 95  
 Agassiz, 27  
 Aldrich, —, 22  
 Ames, Mr. Frederick, 68  
 Ames Memorial, North Easton, Mass., 71  
 Ariitamai (Princess), 98  
 Arundel Society, 14
- Bancel, Victor, 8  
 Bancroft, John, 18  
 Bergamo, 68  
 Bing, Mr. S., 50, 72  
 Binsse de St. Victor, M., 8, 10  
*Bishop Hatto* (drawing), 21  
 Blanc, Charles, 11, 12  
 Bloomingdale, 10  
 Boston Museum, 16  
 Boston, 68  
 Bourget, Paul, 80, 83, 101  
 Brick Church, New York, 43  
 Brooks, Bishop, 77  
 Brownell, Mr., 22  
 Browning, Illustrations for, 21  
 Burne-Jones, Sir Edward, 13, 29, 50  
 Butler, George, 22, 33
- Cambridge, Mass., 27, 54, 72  
 Ceylon, 99  
 Chicago, 71  
 Church of the Ascension, New York (decorations), 44, 71  
 Church of the Paulists, New York (decorations), 48  
 Church, Congregational, Newport (decorations), 40  
 Church, Holy Trinity, Boston (decorations), 29, 30, 33, 37, 38, 43, 51, 52, 60, 75, 77  
 Church, St. Thomas', New York (decorations), 37, 38
- Colonna, Francis, 68  
 Colvin, Mr. Sidney, 29  
*Considerations on Painting*, 22, 99, 100  
 Corot, 13  
 Correggio, 11  
 Couture, Thomas, 10, 11, 16
- Delacroix, Eugène, 12, 13  
 Derby, Dr. Richard, 68  
 Dresden, 12
- Emerson, 22  
 England, 12, 29
- Fiji Islands, 81  
*Fisherman and the Genii, The* (drawing), 21  
 France, 14  
 Franklin, Benjamin, 16  
 Fromentin, Eugène, 81
- Gainsborough, 12  
 Gautier, Théophile, 11  
*Giant and the Traveller, The* (drawing), 21  
 Giotto, 13, 14  
 Guerrier, General, 7
- Harlem (U.S.A.), 10  
 Harvard College, 54, 60, 72  
 Hawaii, 97, 99  
 Heins, Mr. George, 43  
 Homer, Winslow, 22  
 Hudson River, 8, 14, 15  
 Hudson River School, 14  
 Hunt, Holman, 13  
 „ William, 15, 16
- Japan, 22, 44, 78, 80, 81  
 Java, 99  
 Johnston, Mr. J. H., 71

- La Farge, Banceel, 71  
     „ C. Grant, 43, 71  
     „ John, his origin and family, 7, 8,  
     10; education in America, 10; visits  
     Paris and works in Couture's studio,  
     10—13; returns to New York and enters  
     a lawyer's office, 14; studies under  
     William Hunt, 15, 16; his marriage,  
     16; settles at Newport, Rhode Island,  
     16; illustrates books, 21, 22; visits  
     Europe, 29; devotes himself to decora-  
     tive art, 29—48; his work in glass,  
     49—56, 62—77; visits Japan, 80; his  
     travels in the South Sea Islands, 84—99;  
     his lectures on painting, 99—101  
 La Farge, Jean Frédéric de, 7, 8  
 Lathrop, G. P., 17, 22, 30, 37  
     „ Mrs. Thornton, 27  
*Last Valley, The*, 27  
 Leclerc, General, 7  
 Leonardo, 11, 80  
 Longfellow, Illustrations for, 21  
 Louvre, The, 10  
  
*Madonna, The*, 18, 29  
 Madox-Brown, Ford, 29, 50  
 Malietoa, King, 92  
 Manchester Exhibition, 12  
 Marquand, Mr. Henry, 68  
 Marsh, Mr. Henry, 21  
 Martin, Homer, 22  
 Mataafa, King, 95, 96  
 May, Edward, 11  
 Methuen, Mass., 71  
 Metropolitan Museum, New York, 71  
 Michelangelo, 80  
 Millais, Sir J., 13  
 Millet, Jean-François, 13, 15  
 Moorea, 97, 99  
 Munich, 12, 38  
  
*New England Meadow Land*, 27  
  
 Newport, Rhode Island, 16, 26, 40, 68  
 New York, 8, 9, 14, 18, 81  
  
 Padua, 14  
 Paris, 10, 30, 38, 50, 71, 80, 84  
*Paradise Valley, Newport*, 27  
 Perry, Commodore, 16  
     „ Miss Margaret, 16  
 Philadelphia, 7  
 Portland, Maine, 40  
 Pumpelly, Prof., 27, 44, 78  
 Puvis de Chavannes, 12, 29, 21 (note)  
  
 Reid, Mr. Whitelaw, 48  
 Rembrandt, 11, 13, 80  
 Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 12  
 Richardson, Mr. H. H. (architect), 30,  
     33—35, 51  
 Rossetti, D. G., 13, 50  
     „ William, 29  
 Rousseau, Théodore, 13  
 Ruskin, 13  
  
 Saint Domingo, 7, 8  
 Saint Gaudens, Mr., 37, 40, 44  
*Saint John*, 18, 29  
*Saint Paul*, 16—18  
 Saint-Victor (family), 10  
     „ Paul de, 10, 12  
 Samoa, 81, 84, 96—98  
 Stedman ———, 22  
 Stevenson, R. L., 98  
 Tadema, L. Alma, 68  
 Tahiti, 81, 96, 97  
 Turner, 12  
 Tutuila, 84  
  
 Vanderbilt, Mr. Cornelius, 43, 68  
     „ Mr. W. H., 60, 72  
  
*Wolf-Charmer, The* (drawing), 21, 22  
 Wright, Mr. Thomas, 62 (note)



















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